

THE · SILENCES
OF · THE · MOON



HENRY · LAW · WEBB



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The Silences of the Moon

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By
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TO W. COMPTON LEITH

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The Silences of the Moon

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EARLY in the morning I saw the pigeons outward bound from the opposite wood, with the sunlight under their wings, for the sun had only just risen. Three hours later I saw the first butterfly; it was a common white one, but it stayed with me for ten minutes and inspected every flower. Together we made the round of all my beds, stopping to chat with the glad-faced occupants of each, like any couple of district visitors. The rosebuds under the window are still unopened; they are like white hands folded in prayer. In the corner by the door stand the tulips, great dames of a magnificence grander than the pomp of Versailles—the staunch upholders of the garden's dying aristocracy. These strange flowers seem to have all the scornful pride of an Atalanta without a huntress's grace of bearing; but they have most of the feminine virtues—beauty (both of form and colour), purity, pride, reserve. If you have not marked the latter quality, look at them in their prime, when their cups

'God
Almighty first
planted a
Garden'

The patrician
tulip

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are still almost nut-shaped: you will see them wear an expression nearly amounting to primness. Humility, which we only pretend to admire in women, they have not; and how should a queen among spring flowers be humble? They are parables understood by a few, and by them first revered and afterwards loved. That rich temperament of the midsummer rose is as far removed from them as is the daisy's simplicity; but more than any flower they have the sovereign beauty of a nature as dual and contradictory as humanity—and feminine humanity most of all. For their colours, gorgeous as the raiment of a Cleopatra, are a standing protest against their chill spirituality; they are like painted images of the Madonna. In this strange mingling of the voluptuous and the ascetic they continually remind us of passages in Plato and the Christian mystics.

House
martins

I HAVE counted, too, over fifty house martins sunning themselves on the roof at once, and listened to their twitter—a cooing recitative like a cradle-song, the cradle-song of the infant summer, but all too short—the merest gurgle of

bubbling notes. It is so soon over, like the spring that it sings to, and like the *chelidonisma* or swallow-song which the boys and maids of Hellas sang each year at the return of the migratory birds.

Now the sun is on the point of taking his last plunge, and for a few moments I, a human being justly self-despised, I may watch the pink light dreaming in the hollows between the eternal hills—the hills whose eternity passes like a dream.

THE rooks are coming home across meadows of fire, where lie shadowy isles which are really the tops of the oak-trees. To see them rise above the horizon, those ominous galleys under sail before the dying breeze, making their port in yonder patriarchal elms, to watch the first of the flight, an old hierarch with conscious premonition in every flap of his wings, is to travel across the centuries in an instant far back to Aegeus on the promontory of Sunium and the black-sailed ship from the cruel isle of Crete. I sometimes think that if the voice of the nightingale brings us to such thoughts as Plato called a 'recollection' of the

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divine, and if the blackbird and thrush sing, one the melancholy and the other the joy of earthly existence, then in these black hulls of the heavens there is something unearthly and Plutonian. That cry of inexpressible foreboding from a throat hoarse with the repetition through immemorial generations of one cacophonous chord was surely heard upon the banks of Cocytus, 'River of Wailing'!

'Mothy
curfewtide'

NOW the rooks are still, the blackbird's crescendo of groundless alarm has subsided, and the starlings have stopped whistling amazement over their scandals; even the sparrows are tired of their own endless dialectic. One of those 'night-sailing skiffs of the meadows, the cockchafers, has just tacked across the garden and rounded the house with the purblind navigation of all his race. The cows by the river, the sheep under the hill's lea, the dogs at outlying farms who take it in turns to bark in the tentative manner of children beginning to cry, all are silent at last; only the owl is abroad, chilling the woods with his banshee note.

SO with me has passed one of the spring days at which man has no time to wonder, because he is so busily 'making money.' Fool!

I AM a slave and dependent of Nature, but what a freedom that is ! I live like the birds and beasts, having wilfully abandoned all that is held to be true and right in religion and in ethics ; but I have taken my stand on the only immovable truth that man has yet found. I am already forgetting to covet my fellows' wealth and to hanker after their creeds; my riches and religion are both to be found in the earth's fruits, and my creed cannot be recited or put into a book, but only pondered and lived.

IT is a searching test of true poetry and lofty prose to enquire into the quantity of thought and imagination which is compressed into a single epithet. Homer's 'rosy-fingered Dawn' and Milton's 'sable-vested Night' are not mere nouns with adjectives attached to them; they are themselves part of the mint from which singers coin their fancies; to change the figure, they are the germs which under

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'Sic
transit—'

Freedom

'Amica
silentia
lunae'

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the shaping care of another poet may some day grow into a lyric, as a phrase of primitive speech has so often grown into a myth. You remember, reader, the occasion of those three words in the Aeneid—*amica silentia lunae*? The Argives had left their wooden horse before the walls of Troy, had embarked their troops and drawn off their fleet as if in precipitate flight. Packed with silent, listening heroes, the great beast stood alone upon the windy Ilian plain. The Trojans, an inquisitive mob of chieftains and men-at-arms, came down from the city to make a circuit of its giant form; the voice of Sinon, the traitor, raised in the plausible rhetoric of his race, reached faintly the ears of the prisoned company. For a moment, when Laocoön, suspecting the treachery, hurled his spear into the flank of the horse, the fate of Priam's kingdom still hung balanced; but there was a call for ropes and rollers, and a hundred half-willing hands dragged the monster into the city as a trophy and a sacrifice to Pallas. The sun fell seaward; the shadows lay like fallen colossi upon the plains; the guards upon the walls might have seen the peaks of Ida blush and darken and

vanish — but there were no guards upon the walls to heed the sight, for in the city were revels and music. Night fell. The songs languished, and, one by one, ceased — for ever.

‘Vertitur interea coelum et ruit Oceano nox,
Involvens umbra magna terramque polumque
Myrmidonumque dolos; fusi per moenia Teucri
Conticuere; sopor fessos complectitur artus.
Et jam Argiva phalanx instructis navibus ibat
A Tenedo tacitæ per *amica silentia lunæ*
Litora nota petens.’

AENEID, II. 250.

I have been a long while in getting to the point: I pray the reader’s forgiveness. But — ‘The friendly silences of the moon’! I feel as if I must cry out, as De Quincey cried about a passage in *Hydriotaphia*, ‘What a *fluctus decumanus* of rhetoric!’ Those three words are among my most priceless possessions; they are set high among my mind’s Penates beside a flower-spray of Sappho’s song and a sob from the melodies of Mozart, beside a few of those chipped fragments and battered torsos of poetry for which we would willingly lose a whole epic. Mark ‘the *silences* of the moon’ — not ‘silence’ — as if she had fits or moods of silence; and so she has. You, reader,

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if you have watched the variable moods of Nature and know their startling *humanity*, will not accuse me of romancing; you can recall a thousand days and nights when not two hearts alone, but three hearts seemed to beat together; when it was *your* comradeship that the birds sang about and *your* thoughts that the trees whispered each to his friend and neighbour. You know also, if you have gazed from the hills at the graceful wheeling of the heavens, the long spaces of night-stillness when the pulse of the world seems to have stopped, but the pulses of her two children are racing — the pauses between a smile and a smile, between a dream and a dream; surely, these are ‘the friendly silences of the moon’?

*W.B.Yeats,
*The Shadowy
Waters.*

‘I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.’*

Created
personality

IT is something besides the familiarity and comparative nearness of the moon which has made her the patient confidante of the sorrowful for centuries. In that apparently placid, yet seared and tortured shape, seeming aged, yet

really of so young and transient an existence as to demand our human sympathy, once by man endowed with divinity, yet really more helpless than man, we can discern the likeness of a personality remote, but not inaccessible, lovely, benign, and ironically made helpless—the semblance of such a happily feminine temperament as that one of which Pope tenderly has written :

‘An equal mixture of good humour
And sensible soft melancholy.’

The millions of pensive mortal eyes that have gazed upon her, the thousands of passionate-speaking mortal lips that have sung to her, have given her this accumulative personality of infinite tenderness and delicacy; thus also the broad and smiling heaven became under the light touch of a few Aryan generations the broad-smiling Dyaus or Zeus who was so amiable to mortal women. As in the ploughlands which have seen so many golden harvests, in the cliffs which have faced so many furies of storm, so there is a deceptive show of permanence in this worn phantom of a world which has been present as a speechless, derisive spectator

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at countless of the dramatic splendours and follies of man. We are looking upon the face which lonely Hagar looked upon in the desert, which little Ishmael wondered at, and which was turned to pallor by certain bonfires of Nero.

Cornelius Agrippa, with that half-conscious sublimity of symbolism which was peculiar to the medieval pseudo-sciences, speaks of the moon as having astrological influence over wildernesses, woods, rocks and mountains, waters and seashores — that is to say, over the habitations of solitude and non-human voices, in places where Eternity is almost a materialised presence. To step out into moonlight is, after all, to step into the presence of a god ; sorrow which has ached for what seemed many ages melts away at the touch of so rich a maturity, so deep an experience ; it is as though in the midst of our whimpering we were suddenly confronted by the Mater Dolorosa.

De profundis

BUT, alas! sometimes it happens that these silences are all too unbroken. We fly from the coarseness and tangibility of human sympathy to wander under those rays which we have known

to fall upon the sense like the memory of a dead and forgotten song. But now they descend upon a face twisted with agony like rain upon the wrinkled foliage of a tree which ivy is strangling; everything near breaks into a long sigh of thankfulness, but for that one tree no thrill of refreshment is possible. We know that under these same beams in palaces and hovels children are sobbing pitifully, women are trying to pray, men are hating and cursing; the lambs in the meadow are bleating of their imaginary discomforts, the creatures of night wearying themselves with surreptitious crusades against their weaker fellows. The thought of all this multiform misery unrolling itself under the calm glances of the rising orb, while it may and does shew us the comparative insignificance of our proper troubles, shews also the real impotence of even the loveliest and most powerful beauty to drug the gnawing pains of grief.

IN whatever aspect we look at Nature we see her a creature of moods, and of our moods: joyful, because all her children are sometimes joyful; sorrowing, because they must mourn; passion-

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Nature's
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ate, for they are passionate too. Thus it is that at one time the crescent moon will look like an old man, wrinkled and hunchbacked and wan, at another like the incarnation of a dream. In this adaptable sympathy towards us of each giant and weakling among earthly things—of the violet and the pine no less than the moon—is deeply hidden the unity of purpose which lies at the heart of all existence and which shaped the first stirrings of religion into animistic and pantheistic forms. Let my will be thwarted and my spirit crushed; the bluff rock rallies me to defiance, for does it not speak of hardihood and mineral wealth gained by the weight of burden laid upon burden and carried through immemorial years? At times I may long for wealth and glitter, but then the pine whispers of beauty and the austerity of her songs, of freedom and her sternness, of poverty and the hermit's ever increasing store. And here I must take leave to enter upon a digression, for except in the light of such digression these attributes of the pine—its aloofness and, as it were, a certain inscrutable sanctity—may seem arbitrary or fantastic ideas of my own.

EVEN in his dimly lighted age Plato could linger tenderly over the idea, darkly expressed, of character in inorganic and low organic forms of life — of personality which a relentless Power had doomed never or very gradually to pass beyond the embryonic stage of existence. We, with our wider outlook upon Nature, can single out as from a panorama some flower here, there a tree or a rock, and, with searching, find in it some trace of those qualities which by force of established habit we attribute to humanity alone. Let us remember the monastic ideal of starvation — social, intellectual, and bodily. Let us remember how Pater speaks of ‘the clear, cold, inaccessible, impossible heights of the *Book of the Imitation.*’ Then at one time or another, however subconsciously, the thought must come to us, what an ascetic among trees is the pine! Think, how it loves a poor soil; how it can live on sand and rock; how it can breathe the rarefied air of mountain-tops; how its delight is in conditions which to the grosser folk of its kind would bring blasted branches and death. Its chill spirituality makes it the fit companion of silence and the undy-

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The pine

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ing snows. Moreover, like a cowed figure, low-voiced and sparsely clad, it suggests less of time than of eternity; there is something lurid and unearthly about its bare, reddish trunk and funereal crest; its voice is hollow, like the voices of all coniferous trees. So are the voices of poor, stripped branches in winter and of a man who feels himself chilled by the shadow of nearing death. It would seem, too, that the pines have learned the secret of the waves and murmur it to their own hearts day and night; so faithfully do they mimic the primordial cadences of the shore.

The speech
of dumb
things

FROM Nature we may learn all virtues and true arts; from the poplar its solitary introspection, and patience from the watching heron. There are aisles in the arching grass where ants walk as mightily as bishops; and what builder can imitate the symmetry of spruce or larch? Nothing, if it is true to its own nature, is contemptible. Out of 'dumb' matter we derive all purity of colour and most beauties of line; and to the visible materialisations of Nature belong the accumulated wisdom and song of

all the world since the Chaldeans first felt their kinship with the stars; she is the true Pallas Athene, in wisdom eternally at her prime, in beauty immortally fair.

WHAT a glorious belief is that in the immortality of the human memory! It delights me to think that all my recollections are painted in colours more permanent than the worlds; that when the great nebula in Orion has settled down to an orderly existence as a group of solar systems, when its planets have cooled, become habitable, and passed on to such desolation as we see upon our own satellite, I shall still remember how many times I watched the transient apocalypse which men call 'sunset.' Once I looked west up the ancient valley of the Severn, of old a chain of lakes, now a surge of pastures, rolling in billowy perspective from somewhere beneath the horizon — mountainous green waves dotted with black coppices and black fallows. Along the green of earth lay the green of atmosphere, evening's miracle of transparent colour, the lowest rung of a spectrum; above that the strata of clouds, tiers of solemn spectators at

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a world-drama—the lowest cloud, a pall; the next, a veil; the third, a pink rose petal; the fourth, a golden fleece; the fifth, a thin flame—what an allegory! In the northwest and across the zenith danced a swarm of evanescent shapes, gayest ephemera of the heavens, dying and coming to a new birth in a few moments—melting into the infinite background and painting it over again as with a master hand—airy swimmers, diving, as it seemed, beneath a blue surface and rising to view further on in the wind's wake. Southward the clouds were denser, but feathery still—little black feathers, dishevelled and angry; little white feathers, full of light; little gold feathers, full of fire—beneath them, the moon, a slender fairy, curled to sleep above a spectral horizon, where the hills, robed in a golden chlamys, were less substantial than the clouds. I looked eastward down the valley, and saw detached and shattered and drifting forms, ghosts of departed cumuli—the cloudy cattle of the gods driven home from their pasture in high heaven. The top of the opposite hill gradually ceased to show points of vivid light, the reflection of the west in ob-

scure cottage windows; the roan cows on the hillside lower down were no longer blood-red spots in a meadow of fire.

Having seen but once this unveiling of an existence more beautiful than himself, what man can die in misery?

THAT dogmatism which denies to the flowers the possession of anything but growth and procreative power, and names them inanimate or soulless things, men call science. I call it blindness. When they talk of the proletariat and its vegetative existence, they cast a slur on the delicate lily and on the austere pine. They have read *The Sensitive Plant* and *Melampus*, yet they can still tell me with scorn in their eyes and on their lips that I do not live, but vegetate. They are right—of course I vegetate. I would willingly make a vaunt of my adoption into the race which can boast of the rose and the lily and the common grass; I am with them in all seasons, in their birth and in their dying; in time they will tell me more of themselves, and I shall become less blind to their beauty, quicker of ear to their undertones of merriment and ruth.

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and
blindness

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Modern
animism

IN our childhood we fly to Nature as to a mother; in youth she is our mistress, who has reckoned the greatest hearts in all history among her lovers; in age we sit at her feet with tears in our eyes because it seems that we must soon look no more upon her features. It is then at the last that each of us finds comfort — some more, some less — in a certain animistic veneration of her beauty, in strengthening our kinship with her who has been to us mother and queen, in drawing into our own lives the impulsiveness of the wind and the patience of the sea, the harmony of natural colours and voices and forms. From flowers and trees and the strata of rocks we learn the beauty of silent growth and its ultimate strength; we see that, as Emerson told us, ‘the force of character is cumulative,’ and we begin to apply the maxim to what fools call dumb matter. For the rose, the pine, and the mountain are speechless only because the strident human voice shouts them down; if we would but be silent, and learn their moods, and honour their diffidence and reserve as we honour that of a woman or of a friend, then we should learn that their

lives are not motionless nor unprogressive, nor lived for the moment's beauty or utility alone, but that they are full of an infinite and primeval purpose, full of an upward striving and flaming, different merely in degree from the striving of animals and mankind and the gods, or — as we call these latter now — heroes, patriots, seers. But the animistic habit of thought, though it is found in all of us, is habitual only to a few. We have read Plato, it may be, and so we can sympathise with the search for personality in every 'dumb' thing; yet to remember in daily life that the crocus and violet can tell us of other things besides spring, is not always easy; to watch for individuality in every cloud and every breath of wind is possible hardly to anyone in a world which deifies man's wealth and slights the uncoined riches of beast and flower.

IT will be said, I know, that this attachment of mine to the flowers is only a monomania, that a rose is a rose, a cabbage a cabbage, and there's an end of the matter. But if we think for a moment,—we who profess so great a love

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for 'the glory that was Greece,' — we can hardly deny that this almost inevitable flight of the sorrowful, the love-stricken, the disillusioned, to the flowers that nod so wisely over our perplexities and the trees that droop and sigh with us in our woe, is a flight along the same road as the Hellenes took in those dreams of theirs where they stumbled among the tales of Daphne and Clytie and Narcissus and Hyacinthus and many another. The fragility of plant life, its flamelike glory and flamelike evanescence, make of it a satirical parallel to humanity and its vaunted permanences. For the flowers pass away even while we gaze, yet they outlive the promises on which once we set our faith, and their perfume is less transient than the ideals for which once we willingly would have died.

The aspiring
spirit,

LOOK how the crocus, most impatient of delay and restraint, cleaves the sod with its tender leaves! In this upward striving, not to be resisted by any earthy power, the delicate flower is comrade to the long array of saints and heroes — is engaged in the same conflict, animated by the same buoyant spirit.

There is wisdom in that story of Jack and the Great Beanstalk that grew up to heaven ; it teaches us to look beyond the law of gravitation. I hear people say that it is an impossible fairy-tale ; I say that it is founded on fact—the fact of endless growth, or, if you will, of evolution. Nor is it any marvel when Xanthus, the tawny-maned, or the good steed Gran talks with Achilles or Gudrun : the gift of speech is denied to nothing that can be apprehended by our five senses.

AS youth fades from us like a soft-coloured dream, we begin to weary of this militant and aspiring spirit ; our vernal optimism loses its vivid colouring and puts on a russet cloak ; our outlook grows a little more melancholy and autumnal ; having proved all things and paid the priceless tribute of enthusiasm at the shrine of many a saint and philosopher, we gather together, as devout pilgrims, the relics which from time to time we found and laid aside, and tramp away with them, our most valued treasure, to lay them—creeds and ideals and philosophies and dreams (I put them in order of climax) — at the feet of the

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only steadfast mother of them all, whom, when we have once devoutly approached, we shall never leave either for the world with its philtres and spells, or for the cloister's coronal of painless sighs. Yet to find a rest in Nature is not to join the castaways on a lotos isle ; she hands us no narcotic, but a stimulant — not a phial from Lethe, but the nectar of the Everliving Ones. It is true that hereby we become forgetful of much which we formerly held sacred ; that is the penalty of every conversion. It is true that our enthusiasms will lose their keen edge ; they are to be merged in the one enthusiasm truly so called (we gain everything by remembering the word's derivation), which brooks no rival faith. If it is their fate to grow dull, yet our senses will be quickened and our hearts made to beat high by an intimate converse with a wider, saner world than that of politics or society, a converse unbroken by propagandist street-cries ; we soon find that a sparrow can teach us more of the spirit of Nature than the Pre-Raphaelites.

Evolution

IT was a deeper wisdom than we think which conceived the circle to

be the fundamental form, the symbolical sum and limit of all endeavour. Since the beginning of history we have been sorrowfully familiar with renascence and decadence and darkness and renascence again, following each other as inevitably as the watches of day and night. The Golden Ages of Hellenic, of Italian art were gone almost as soon as men began to suspect their presence ; the glorious dawn of medieval philosophy, which gave birth to the dreams of universal knowledge and universal sovereignty over Nature's economy, passed into an era of empiricism and disagreeable facts and what America calls sham-smashing. In later times we have climbed from Palestina to Wagner; and who shall say that *Parsifal* is wholly a triumph and not in some ways ominous of decline? Before we know that we have topped the wave we are rushing headlong into the trough ; who will blame us if we cry out against this bitterness ? There is one remedy and only one, for aught that I know : let us go for comfort to her whose ideal is unchanging, whose existence is one long Saturnian reign, and in whom we can discern neither decadence, nor renas-

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The eternal
Golden Age

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cence, nor prime, but the graceful motion of evolution alone. She is no strange Goddess whom we are to set out to restore, for our fathers, the cave-dwellers, worshipped her in their own crude way; the Hellenes, our ancestors in art and thought, served her under a hundred different names, but with fear and reverence always; the philosophy of the Renaissance, with its noble contempt of authority and the idols of dogma, was no less than a return to her religion from the stilted creed, of gorgeous, wonderful, stiffened raiment, which saw a devil in the nightingale and damnation in all the five senses. These were her servants, her worshippers, her students; it has been left for us and for our children to be called her lovers. In the future we shall speak of Wordsworth and Turner as we speak now of Dante and Cimabue; they will be as the outrunners of a host or the first stars of a rising constellation. But then, as it seems, after the first years must come the reaction; under the law of eternal motion and change this passionate Nature-spirit, which now so softly walks among us, will be whirling back to its apogee, and we shall return

from the companionship of flowers to grubbing with our fellow-men in the search for misery and gold. We shall be just as we were—perhaps, a little more soured and broken-spirited. Now this is an objection which cannot be answered ; but let any man come to Nature as a true lover, and if he has thenceforward no longing to forsake her, he has already answered it for himself.

I KNOW that there is danger in such a forgetfulness of what custom foolishly calls the realities of life ; that there arises a temptation to sing philosophy to sleep with Arcadian ditties : but it may be overcome, if we remember that Nature asks more of us than the woodcraft and weather-wisdom of a yokel, which is but a few stages above instinct. As her gifts to us have been more lavish, so she requires a worthier return ; the countryman sees her reflection in his folklore, we in our sciences and creeds. The bucolic types of *Il Pastor Fido* and of the Wessex novels touch the flying skirt of Nature's garment—surely, that is why we love them?—but we ourselves shall look in her face, because we are the heirs of the

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Bona Dea

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art and poetry and wisdom of centuries. For in listening to the voice of Aratus or Turner we are listening to an echo of her own, and when they have taught us of the stars and the sun's rising and setting, we become clearer of vision. We fall short in some measure of the monkish and Neoplatonic ideals; we do not think of all fair forms and colours as no more than a prototype or a shadow, but the earth and her divers races become more real. We learn to view man from an outlying peak on his own horizon; not from his own standpoint, but from the standpoint of the rest of existence; then our intimacy with the non-human economy grows apace. Animism is an air which has outworn many variations, many a stirring song and grafted melody. It is as old as religion and as modern as Emerson. Among those to whom Nature is rather a mistress than a veiled and speechless nun an animistic habit of thought is almost universal; such as love Nature for herself cannot choose but worship her. Many people think that they love Nature because she is God's wonderful creation; they must love her *alone*, and only thus will she reveal to them her secrets. The

waverers will say that to know her a man must be a pagan; but he must be more than that—he must be a whole-hearted idolater.

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Distances

IN nature, in art, in life, in religion, in philosophy, the foreground is nothing; only the distance matters. Show us a landscape full of light, and it is the distance that gives us the subtler gradations of colour; in life we fix our eyes on the future, in religion on Heaven or Nirvana; in philosophy we may concede or reject the premises, but nearly always we admire the conclusions. Men may dislike the preliminary ‘blasphemies’ of Nietzsche, but they cannot despise the ideal which he built up from their chaos. Such ideals lie on the horizon of thought, and it is the glory of their vague forms and colours which allures us to study the truth of their foreground. How many people must have first read Plato because in some stray quotation they caught an echo from the far heights of the *Phædrus*! Do we then wonder at Plato? It is because he can paint for us the remote metaphysical distances which lesser men cannot even see. Are we dumb before a

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sunset of Turner or fired by a rhapsody of Emerson? It is because they give us a glimpse of infinity.

THIS longing for the remote, the visionary, the transcendental, is older than Hellenic philosophy, as old as Aryan mythology — contemporary with Zeus and Cronos and the heavenward speculations which gave them birth. It has reappeared under heavy cloak or filmy garb in the Fourth Gospel, in the *Vita Nova*, in the German mystics, in bold thinkers like Bruno and gentle recluses like San Juan de la Cruz. In one of the noblest books of recent days I found it written that ‘Not Plato’s or Dante’s creative power, but truth surviving all incarnations of genius has kept this celestial gem aglow; they have but celebrated that which was never mortal, and guided distracted eyes to heaven’s most beautiful star.’* Now in this day when materialism seems so plausible and sufficient, I can still believe with Bruno that ‘man’s infinite desire is itself a pledge of its fulfillment in an eternal life;’ for though there are times when the common, marvellous beauty of a flower, or the com-

* *Apologia Diffidentis*, by W. Compton Leith.

mon, marvellous song of a bird, will lead us to what seem like the confines of sleep (so fully are our senses gratified and even sated with the perception of beauty), yet—has a man ever in all his days been sated with thought? In all Nature's scheme, so far as we know it, there is nothing insatiate save the mind; and that, as it would seem, is insatiable.

WE who live to-day are a complex folk, yet all our current speculation may be traced to two original quests — of Nature and of the supernatural. Only now, after many thousands of years, are we beginning to realise that these two ideas are really one — that natural and supernatural are the same thing under different aspects. There can be nothing above Nature, for there is nothing outside. In speaking of Nature we connote all existences. So it comes about that the rudest shepherd who ever cried to Arcadian Pan was nearer to the truth than the mass of mankind to-day. We know far more of Nature's ways and means than the Hellene, yet we understand her temperament less than

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he. It is the inevitable bitterness of empiricism and research that, as our knowledge of Nature grows, our childish intimacy with her dies away. We lose sight of her sweet womanliness, the changing moods, the merrymaking and sorrow; we give up the fair vision of personality; we forget the distance in poring over the foreground, and despise generalisations because the time is all too short even to study the individual aspect. It is this attitude which has killed the nymphs and satyrs; let us see that it does not kill the idea which gave them birth, for the idea was the first gift of Nature to the thought of mankind. Men sometimes are heard to marvel at the credulity which could people the oaks with Dryads, and see the cry of mourning on the petals of the hyacinth. The marvel is really this — that so long ago as the age of Hellas, men should have been playing, like children, on the threshold of wisdom, whereas we are so far away. The march of science, the wane of superstition, the ascendancy of reason, have all cleared our way to Nature; and instead of going to her for a new religion and a new rule of life, we try to raise a second-

hand fabric from the rubbish which has been moved from our path.

EVERY act of a man's life, every passion of his body, every thought of his mind, should sing to Nature a panegyric that shall never cease; the whole world should be her cathedral of perpetual adoration. As Christianity tells us that in violating one of its ten commandments we violate the spirit of all, so all wickedness should be, and, in time, will be, summed up in one sin — the sinning against Nature. The righteousness which is contrary to what is natural is no righteousness; the piety which ignores Nature is itself ignored by her, and will presently perish of its own vanity. It has taken us countless centuries to find that nature lay at the root of all religions, and now that we know it, we must still spend ages in spinning out of our new ideals the web of a new religion which shall exclude nothing but what is unnatural. We are to take our lessons not from super-civilisation, but from the fields; not from Baudelaire, but from the saga and the *chanson de geste*. Men talk of the noble stream of progress and forget that a

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stream is noblest at its source; at many a stage in history we must return to the primal springs of inspiration which lie on the horizon of thought. Nor is this a reversion to barbarism and its crude economies; it is a regaining of the old trail, a return to the truth from specious half-lies, as were also the Renaissance and the age of the Pre-Raphaelites, in philosophy the age of Paracelsus, in music the age of Wagner. Though a retracing of steps seems to be implied when we speak of going back to Nature, there is really no retrogression, but an advance; and it was necessary that we should taste the bitterest dregs of civilisation before we could be convinced of the deadening effect of the draught. I cannot illustrate this necessity more forcibly than by quoting Amiel's words: 'Comprendre les choses, c'est avoir été dans les choses puis en être sorti; il y faut donc captivité, puis délivrance, illusion et désillusion, enjouement et désabusement. Celui qui est encore sous le charme et celui qui n'a pas subi le charme sont incompetents. On ne connaît bien que ce qu'on a cru puis jugé. Pour comprendre il faut être libre et ne l'avoir pas toujours été. Cela

est vrai, qu'il soit question de l'amour, de l'art, de la religion, du patriotisme.'

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Poppies

WHEN summer goes hot-cheeked on the south wind, among all her tricks of contrasted colour none is of so finely balanced harmony as the yellow corn with the white butterflies breasting its waves and the red poppies dipping beneath them. These poppies are in some respects alien to our occidental idea of beauty. They are eastern in their pleonasm of colour and their theatrical airs; they delight but they do not rest the eye. They have none of the daisy's 'function apostolical,' for their message is a flaming glory rather than a moral; surely this difference is not to be imputed as a shortcoming to either? They lack the tulip's stately disdain and the more human queenliness of the rose; their flaunting seems at first sight barely to avoid vulgarity. Their stiff and crinkled petals with the absence of leafage anywhere near the calyx give them an appearance strangely artificial; they are the most easily imitated of flowers, a miracle of substantial unreality. If we compare the daisy to a Griselda, we may

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liken the poppy to Horace's irresponsible Pyrrha, '*simplex munditiis*'; but such comparison would be purely superficial, for the poppy's character is not read, as is that of some flowers, at a single glance. Every flower has its proper atmosphere, its influence upon us in calling up certain distinctive images and associations; and, like nearly all the flowers which fable has woven into its chaplet of song, the poppy has a secondary significance, a personality as well as lineaments; of this personality, elusive, inconsistent, and unforeseen, mythology is the expression, though not the source. If the mimosa has fits of shyness and the narcissus spells of pensive egoism, then it may be said that the poppy is a creature of moods. Tossing defiant heads above the groundswell of the corn, they are flashes of beauty in a workaday, utilitarian world, glimpses such as meet the city toiler in a streak of light in the west, or such as arrest him with their visionary fairness at his entry into a crowded gallery of art. In the bright sunlight their expanded petals forget all but their own gaiety; a breath of wind causes them almost hysterical flappings. Under sunshine and

the world's admiration they are in their element, but theirs is a transient optimism. The approach of evening, a fall of the barometer, the shade of a tree travelling across their corner of the cosmos, will close the petals and change all their levity to gloom; moonlight shows them as sullen fires in a world by comparison turned pale. In the very midst of their radiance there is something darkly ominous and sad, just as in the middle of each petal there lies in some varieties a stain of pitchiest black. The juice in which Demeter found solace for her undying grief is the juice of the white poppy (*papaver somniferum*), less familiar to our northern eyes; but if its opiate strength is less, the scarlet flower with its sombre heart under folds of a garish cloak has a power over the eye and imagination equalled by few among plants of the temperate zone. The tale of the white flower once created for slumber's sake at the time of autumn sorrow has cast its shadow upon its brighter sister, so that both are for ever latent in our minds when we think of the sad, chastened figure of Demeter. The passing of Persephone, queen of the early year, type

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of cyclic birth and decay, becomes a visible masque to eyes watching these garish and frivolous ephemera of the year's high noon. At all hours and seasons the poppy is present in the memory of man as his symbol of rest; but its festival is surely in the penumbral midnights of summer, for it was then that the busts of Hypnos, brooding over the silent streets, once wore for their garlands these most gorgeous yet most melancholy of aestival blooms.

Demeter
of Knidos

THE Demeter of Knidos has always been for me the most eloquent of all the works of Hellenic art, for in her we seem to draw most near to the heart of Nature. We have learned, and learned rightly, to look for the noblest expression of sorrow wedded to resignation in those passionless yet allusive features of the Madonna to which the clairvoyant portraiture of the Renaissance gave a significance more than human. But, whereas these are the work of the children of Art, the Demeter is the work of the children of Nature—I had almost called her an emanation of Nature herself, just as much

as the olive and pomegranate and cypress that lavished (but surely did not waste) their beauty in her birthplace of Knidos. It is because she is a Hellene, the work of a Hellene, and therein closer than medievalism to the mystery of Nature, that I take her as the type of that deep-hearted sadness which underlies earth's fairest scenes and is audible even in her most dithyrambic moods. It is not only on those autumn evenings when we feel that melancholy is come to hold silent carnival with her votaries, but at all times and before all scenery the tones of sorrow come home in some degree to the dullest sense. The very gladness of the young year, when spring comes faltering like an Oread over the hills, has its tragic note, in tune with the half-solved mystery of birth; summer's fulness is not without foreboding; autumn has ever been the advent season of a spirit of gloom. The yearly masque of Persephone's abduction and return has as deep a meaning for us as for the nameless sculptor of Knidos; the brooding figure that speaks of sorrow's dignity is no less than a portrait of Nature.

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The Sorrow-
ful Mother

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antitypes

MEN have always thought of Nature as a woman; she is Tonantzi or Holda or Demeter or Bona Dea. Now the worship of Bona Dea prepared the way for the more beautiful cult of the Virgin protectress of crops and humble toilers in the field, so that this new and most radiant divinity, the 'sum of virtue virginal,' was welcomed to earth with the eagerness which always attends the re-incarnation of a long venerated ideal. When, therefore, under the symbol of a saint or goddess who is benign, if also sorrowful, we offer allegiance to Nature, we are taking a step which is neither novel nor retrograde. And here let it be said that the holiness of the saints equally with the immortality of the gods finds an antitype in Nature; we must go to her if we would learn justice and purity — justice free from commentaries and purity stripped of etiquette. The saint or the martyr or the virgin is heart to heart with Nature; though you shear away her golden hair and put out the eyes where celestial dreams once had their lodging, though you fetter her hands that never again they may chase the fever from any brow, what have you done after all?

She is still a saint and all-strong in the spirit of Nature ; you, I, the world, are her playthings. It is so with Nature herself, the strong spirit whom man thinks to have tamed ; he may hew down her trees for his purpose and break her forces to his will, he may banish the elves and satyrs to the company of children and simple folk, but he cannot destroy the Idea which is mother to elf and satyr and all true philosophy and all true song — the complex Idea which we with our English brevity summarise in the one word — Nature.

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Symbolism

SYMBOLS are the fairest blossoms of all thought, even of philosophical thought, wherein they are exotic ; they are alien to logic, hand in hand with imagination. We can never dispense with them any more easily than we could dispense with one of our senses ; life without symbols would be a language without metaphors. They are the foundation of every attempt to explain deity by religion or philosophy or the arts ; they lie at the root of all beauty expressible or inexpressible by words. We may talk of ideals, but our words carry sense not

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before we have reduced them to the terms of a symbol. It is obvious that we cannot live save under one or other of the potent spells of religion; worship, whether of a God or a Lover or an Ideal, is the mind's needed respite from self. It is for this reason that the quasi-religion of Nature cannot be other than symbolic, that is, dependent upon symbols for its realisation; we must find a species of personality, however ill-defined, in that which we would approach as loving and divine. So fierce is this hunger for something spiritually tangible, something individual, upon which to lavish our whole souls, that to the lonely and disappointed, who have been driven from the haunts of men and hounded away to the fields and woods by the ghastly spectres of their old illusions, the search for a latent personality in crude organic and inorganic objects becomes the infinite reward of past and less and less remembered tribulations; the flying pessimist becomes a learner in the school of gratitude, the fool in the world's eyes attains a grasp of the truest wisdom. For out of this personality, too shadowy to grow stale, too remote ever to be stained with the

dyes which poison and deface humanity, he may draw out a sympathy the deeper because it is unspoken, the more eloquent in that it cannot be wholly understood. So that although the religion which we seek may be less a creed than a comradeship, at once tender and reverent, with Nature, it is nevertheless the one possible, even satisfying alternative for the heart that has vainly pined (and what sensitive heart has not?) to possess the white and Elysian flowers of religion without the foulness, clinging at their roots, of dogma, ignorance, insanity, misbelief. A dogma is in its rudiments nothing more than an encrusted symbol; it is such crust of commentaries and interpretations which we see fall away in scales when we go open-hearted to Nature. Animism, the first and the last of religions, the crudest and the most delicate, exerts its power equally upon Wordsworth and the Bushmen, as gravitation does upon the thistle-down and the boulder; each interprets differently the magnetic pull which he cannot help but feel, yet the difference is in him, not in Nature. The intermediate creeds all have served to refine the primitive, not

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The last of
the creeds

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saintship

to supersede it, and they alone can see the fair features and sanity of animism whom culture has taught to love what is natural; we must study the deformities of art before we can place even an approximate value upon the one form of beauty utterly free from any taint of the grotesque, the beauty of natural lines and colours.

WHEN we glance over the vaunted superiorities of man, this bombastic and sacrosanct mammal, and turn our attention even momentarily to the enormous content of matter and the infinite vistas of space in respect of which his senses are helpless and his reason delusive, and when we compare his trivial, homespun wisdom with that which assuredly he will gain if the solar and terrestrial conditions remain favourable to his race, the dawn-streaks of the present with the blazing noonlight of the future, then we naturally fall to wondering how such names as atheist and dogmatist, materialist and spiritualist, can be deemed indispensable words among men and women even of the veriest simplicity and of an education the most superficial,

without provoking the same tolerant smile which meets now those once so fascinating sciences (fascinating, because at least they were lavish in promise, if not always lofty in ideal), the knowledge of alchemy and enchantment, or the childish wisdom of astrology, that borderland of the ridiculous and the sublime.

ATHEISM and spiritualism, though as names they are continually on our lips, as ideas are equally antiquated with any such errors of science in the past; and of the many philosophical quackeries and fashions none is less philosophical and more difficult to hear without impatience than the arrogant denial of all imperceptible existence. We say that there is no God, when the utmost that we are rationally entitled to say is that the human faculties in their present condition are incapable of forming a reasonable conception of God. We say that man has no soul, when we are only justified in saying that the mental or psychic functions are not, as we once imagined, to be differentiated from other branches of our physiological activity.

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The futility
of negations

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sanctity

The almost inconceivable capacity which the human brain may yet reach forbids us to deny the possibility of *any* development. Man is potentially — anything! We must be ready, therefore, to believe anything concerning his future which the past has not refuted; the future must find us all-credulous. At the same time we shall believe nothing which the laws of evidence show to be not proven; we shall not trust the wisdom of the present; we must stand forth as passive nihilists, craving the union (still vulgarly despised as an immorality) of nihilism and saintship — but not the saintship of rosaries and chaunted myth. For we do not always remember that there is a sanctity essential to Nature as well as the sanctity derived from creeds; among beasts and flowers, who nestle close to Nature, is to be found neither conscious foulness, nor dishonesty, nor broken vows; the cynical or the obscene point of view is not possible to one who lives intelligently among these beasts and plants and trees; vulgarity is utterly alien to all organic existence save man. It is undeniable that the saintly ideal is of all the most graceful, the most delicate, a lily among ideals;

we cannot look unmoved upon its tight hand-clasp of purity, its rapture wrung from suffering, its faith plainly to be read in eyes glassing eternity. The cause which was mother to the *Paradiso* and the *De Imitatione Christi*, which has made heroes of the earth's offscourings, and which could bring Cynewulf to dream the *Dream of the Rood*, has shown us that the desire for sanctity is inherent in the human race, has shown us to what heights, higher than snow-clad, the will unsupported by reason may rise. Grant to this faithful and masterful will, not yet proof against the foolish knaveries and knavish fooleries which we call sin, the eyes open to see upon what a base, broadening to infinity, the desire of sanctity has been placed, with what tenderness it has been cherished by Nature among her pet children (for is not this the lesson which we learn from Saint Francis among his birds and flowers?), and how the fairest creed is only a cup of cold water to leave us the more madly thirsting—and man shall sow the seeds of a new saintship beside which the holiness of the Fathers shall seem parochial. The workaday piety of the Puritan,

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Christianity,
the world's
loveliest
phase—
hitherto

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though we may ever learn from him his disdain of misnamed realities, cannot fail ultimately to become a sounding cymbal, as must all religions founded upon a principle foreign to Nature's scheme ; the passionate orisons of the darlings of Christ, though they are born of a love so fiery as to blind the eyes of such as approach through curiosity and unguarded by reverence, must flicker and fail in the presence of perennial laws—laws of astronomy, of biology, of geology, of chemistry. The men and women who walked apart from Nature because they seemed to detect guile in the rose's heart and desire in the pleading of the nightingale have loved and died almost in vain, for their lavish passion went to crown an abstraction and their martyrdom only confirmed a mistaken belief. We are tempted to think, perhaps, if this is so, what a tragedy ! what irony, more biting than Sophoclean ! But there is no tragedy, though the irony is perceptible which is eternally attendant upon organic existence ; for out of the generations nourished upon Christ comes the ardent martyr-spirit, careless of pain ; from the trust in an almighty being who was before the

worlds comes the faith in a nature-of-things essentially and ultimately wise, even if fortuitously; from the icy asceticism, spotless in a not exemplary age, comes the power to see purity inherent in all living things. Without this clearing of the cumbered ground, this laying down of smooth roads for the wayfaring soul, the birth of the wooers of Nature had been postponed for centuries; we owe our close and earnest comradeship with all visible beauty to Christianity as well as to Hellas, for if the latter showed us the fairness of the human form, the former told us by what means it is made fair. We, therefore, to whom history and science have become so propitious, need make no flight to a far and supersensuous beauty, nor build ephemeral shrines and temples on the sands of a dream, nor pile rubric on statute for the better storming of an impregnable heaven: for since we see both the sensuous and the supersensuous to be fair and persuasive and hold them both sacred, we shall go back to the groves for our worship and chaunt our human strophe and antistrophe of sorrow and joy under aisles unbuilt by human hands, in

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an oratory whose sights and sounds and fragrance bring us a sympathy or compassion (in the most literal meaning of the words) passing the charity of men. But though we fly to the groves, it is not to bow down to an Astarte; the purity of Nature, pervading and inherent in us all, is our safeguard against her too cogent appeal to our senses, and if she entices us to excess, it is that we may gain the strength of a vanquished temptation.

‘There is no
saint like the
sky, sunlight
shining from
its face’

THE cries of frenzied communities over their barterings and superstitions and strife are a hum in our ears long after we have cast their objects adrift. It is impossible to attain at a leap a detachment from futilities which the accumulated wealth of ages has sanctioned; we have done well if at the end of a long life we have cast away a single one of the stiff and faded cerements in which each of us is wrapped (strange irony of convention!) on his entry into the world. For though at last we may tear away, not without pain, one or two of these entrammelling garments, others are left still to be torn away; if the shroud of the delusion of religious dogma must

soon be cast off, it is not always followed by the shroud of the delusion of etiquette, of wealth, of nobility foolishly so called. Our *idola* are no fewer now than they were when Bacon smiled gravely over their vanity ; but they are more subtle, highly developed, and elusive; they can be destroyed only by years of intimacy with the wisdom of visible facts and beauties. So that if at first we find none of the comfort in tangible things which we were used to find in abstractions, we must try not to despair or call Nature morose. Though the temperament which craves for Christianity also craves for sympathy, yet in a while we find it in the gaze of flowers and the tender side-long glances of birds ; later on, peculiar affinities are merged in the general goodwill, and we take Nature a willing lover into our arms. Years may elapse (for banished Christianity leaves more than a momentary hiatus) before we are drawn close to the symbolic spirit of Nature by that same reciprocal ardency of passion which we knew in the symbolic Christ ; but it is given us to be freed almost immediately from the dulness of sense which in a bird's song can hear nothing but a

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bird singing ; it is given us to know the cradle of the Gods, to pass beyond the Propylaeum with its thousand caryatid mythologies into the fane of the great mother alike of god and myth. Knowing how to detect the true and the false, we shall run no risk of grasping at shadows instead of substance ; placing no value upon superstition, we shall yet have the senses able and quick to see the *aiaî* upon the curly hyacinth, or to hear Thor's hammer and the tears of the sorrowful mother of Baldur in the boom and wailing of the northeast wind. The way to a new religion lies ever through the old ; we pass the landmarks of vanished beliefs at every step on our way to the parent creed — landmarks which, in so far as they are true attempts to visualise the spirit of Nature, we shall build into the fabric of our new life.

Steadfastness
under change

IN time Nature lets us into the secret of what we had been pleased to call her caprices — womanly caprices. Slandered Nature ! Slandered womankind ! When shall we learn that, as caprices are traits the least admirable and, therefore, the least characteristic of woman-

hood, so wanton changefulness is in Nature the quality most rarely found, most foreign to her serenity? We find ourselves referring to her, as we learn more and more of her marvellous ways, the 'character of large-browed steadfastness' which is never absent in the best of women. Watch her spirit in the contemplative idleness of the cirrus and in the energy of the flying scud; in the rise and fall of the wheatfield, a heaving bosom beneath cloth of gold; in the throat-curve of a Mary lily, the flower which is sacredly luminous at darkest night; in the hills, which always seem remote, even when you stand upon their summits. It would be hard to find her in moods more diverse, in attitudes more individually symbolic; but she may be seen under thousand forms and colours whenever we wish — in the hedgerow, in the garden, in the sky, and every time we look out of a window. Now this very diversity is the cloak of deepest steadfastness, the play of smile and changing expression over changeless features: under all variation and apparent divergence from purpose there is the same pertinacity. For every divergence is but an off-

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evolution of
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shoot of Nature in search of some new development of beauty; the branches feel their way outwards, but the growth of the tree is eternally upwards. See the countless religions which have sprouted from the central idea of a self-existent guiding power (a God, as we used to say): trace them in the ascending scale from animism through Plato to Spinoza: has not the strife been not merely expansion, but an everlasting ascent? There remains the further climb to a wise and purified animism which is the perception of an eternal progress behind the parable of temporal things; it is this meaning which brings animism into line with every noble creed of this and other days by showing the ideal trivialities of the world to be its only realities, and the things to which it attaches so much importance to be the scrannel trinkets deified by a social intelligence less than puerile. But whereas the ascetic ideals of the past have always laid natural impulse under a ban, and generally natural beauty also, it is the glory of Nature's own asceticism that it is built upon those very foundations which a rudimentary knowledge of man and his relation to the universe rejected

as treacherous. We no longer walk in the earth's garden with closed senses; our whole life is a seeing, a hearing, an understanding, and a helping of others to see, hear, and understand likewise. There is less play for the emotions because we have destroyed hysterical religion; there is more play for the emotions because we have become keener of sense. Future religion will be neither of reason nor of emotion, but of a sanity which includes both, knowing them not to be contradictory.

THE beginning and end, the cause and effect, of all worship is the out-pouring of a mind to that which is beautiful like itself: so that, when I speak of worshipping a flower, I mean just as much and just as little as when I speak of worshipping a God. Call this Beauty, universally immanent, by what name we will, Eros, or Nature, or World-Spirit, or Christ, we must needs yield to it all honour and devotion, either mediately through the passion of human love, or immediately, as is the lot of some few who are unloved, and therein both fortunate and sorrowful: in such case have

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or the
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been hermits and Nazarites and seers of every country and age. As earthly love may be a prelude to the love of the bright abstractions of thought which men called Gods, so it may swell from these thinnest pipings to the complex music which is knowledge and love of Nature. When, one after another, the tokens of her tenderness are discovered, clasped unconsciously in our own hands, then our love-song begins to grow, as it were, orchestral; we become aware of harmonies hitherto undreamed; what was a ditty is expanding into an overture.

Justice

BUT a man foul-minded or malevolent is the laughing-stock of Nature, though he rule continents. If the king to whom you are asked to do servile obeisance plays the gallant or the toss-pot, his crown is a fool's cap; you may hear the same healthful, derisive laughter of the Gods as greeted the snaring of Ares and Aphrodite in the net of Hephaestus. Nature is the eternal source of what we call poetical justice. In the end the oppressor is always worsted and the injured cause set right. Collectively there has never been any such thing as injustice,

nor the necessity for any such thing as law; in sum every act is balanced by its consequence, every flicker of thought works out its own punishment or reward. Act and consequence are as indissoluble as subject and predicate; though the consequence of our thought at this moment may be as a dry grain of wheat for a few thousand years, it will one day bear its stalk of golden corn: as there is nothing unrequited, so there is nothing trivial and unimportant. The existence of such words as 'injustice' is a blasphemy against the holy spirit of Nature; it should be blotted out of a language along with its hideous kindred—'illegal,' and 'sinful,' and 'unfair.' Never do things prey upon each other save in everlasting orbits; man destroys the proudest beasts of the forests and himself falls a prey to comparatively ignoble forms of life which are, perhaps, ultra-microscopic. One plant is robbed of its sweetness by the insect, and another snares the insect for its food. Neither in the past nor the present is there such a thing as a wrong unrequited in its due proportion.

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MILLET said: 'One is never so Greek as in painting naïvely one's own impressions, no matter where they were received.' I have tried here on long summer evenings to paint my impressions of the coy and reticent spirit of Nature, who in all ages has shown herself veiled and in briefest glimpses to man: who planted in him the instinct of animism and faery lore; who by her hints of dormant personality led him to dream of her and call her divine, and brought to the birth in his mind such fair offspring as the stories of Brynhild, or the Sweet Briar Rose, or Hyacinthus, or Syrinx fleeing from the arms of Pan.

II

The progress
from
pessimism —

I SUPPOSE it must be granted that pessimism is generally plausible, nay, at first sight full of conviction. We seem to be so tantalised and perpetually betrayed; our fairest flowers of hope are blighted, the harvest of our acts is all too mean. We find so much that is universally applicable in the gloomy myths of Daedalus and Niobe and Faust, so little

in the reassuring myths of the Golden Fleece, of Odysseus' return, and of the achieving of the San Graal; such truth in the irony of Sophocles, such blindness in the optimism of Browning. There is the quintessence of melancholy in Heraclitus' brief summary of philosophy — 'Nothing pauses: all things flow;' and, viewed from one standpoint, there is the same sadness in every change of organic life. If we are momentarily buoyed up by a glimpse of earthly beauty or an intuition of spiritual delight, if we are borne away on the glory of starlight or of high speculative thought, it is only to be cast down again as suddenly as we seem to fall in a dream. As in a dream, too, our vision, however deliriously sweet, has always some bitterness, even if it be only in the awakening.

YET eventually it becomes plain, though nothing but time and growth will make it so, that this idea of ours is no more than superficial. The sullen grey of stormy waves (the 'unharvested sea' to the landlubber, but not to the fishermen or the pearl-divers) conceals form and colour and infinite miracle beneath; it

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— through
Nature —

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is so with all existence. There is unity in those flashes of confidence which seem unrelated and parenthetical; they are like the islands apparently sown broadcast in the ocean, really the peaks of a hidden mountain range. Their connection is only submerged; their apparent irrelation incites us to prove them related. The fact that they are momentary and infrequent shows them to be precious; they follow the law of farseeing Nature which says, You shall have but few saints in a century, and they shall have but few rhapsodies in a life. As the ideal of saintship has never died, knows neither Time nor Space, but keeps reappearing as a thread of gold in the immense tapestry of history, so it must be with everything of tried and enduring value. The apparent evanescence of such conceptions is in inverse ratio to their durability. Thus the ideas of patriotism, self-denial, temperance, chastity, wax and wane and leave their periods marked on the world's story as clearly as ripples on a sandy shore. Aristippus of Cyrene, or the Encyclopaedists, or the modern philosophy of Egoism may seem to banish them, but the more total their disappearance, the

more certain is their return. The friendship of men and of women, the love of man and woman, the devotion, annihilating self, to country or conviction, the centripetal flight of the human mind to her or him who is called Nature and God — every radiance of ideal purity and every grandeur of ideal self-sacrifice — all these are too real to be temporal, too transient not to be immortal.

YOU remember Kingsley's saying in that most wonderful of all his books, the *Water Babies*, that 'a game-keeper is only a poacher turned inside out'? So we find with our pessimistic view : turn it inside out, and it is found to be optimism after all ! We must be doleful as long as we see only the tops of the islands instead of their roots in the depth of the sea. A dilettante philosophy is never to be trusted, and it is either muddily pessimistic or the shallowest optimism ; if we make our philosophy the first question of life, it will always be found confident and scornful of despair. After all, the great test question for every philosophy is, How does it come into line with Nature ? She is the canon

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—to
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of all arts and dogmas, the focus of all thought : let us take our creed to the hills and the running streams, and lay its puny half-truths beside the austerity of the one and the low-crooned cradle-song of the other, so that, if it is a pure creed, it may expand into a possession worth dying for, and, if so, worth living for also.

Eclecticism

WE hear the materialist tell us that the tangible is all-inclusive; and we hear the Christian saying that this world is but a shadow of the true substance. We may learn from both; from the one his wisdom of living the hour for the hour's sake, from the other his intellectual beauty and his fair ideal. But let us beware of devotion to either; for have we not given the whole heart to Nature, who understands no treachery? We must not see with the materialist, for to him Nature means no more than an apotheosis of protoplasm, nor with the Christians, for they hold their dogma to be higher than Nature's laws. If our guides are chosen from either of these, we are to follow them blindfold, lest a greater beauty than they can offer should draw us away. Surely this is to become

pilgrims of a darker night than ever we deemed at setting out? Yet there is not a creed nor an enthusiasm that cannot teach us something. The dervish and the fakir teach us their indifference to the moment's life or its pains, the saint his thaumaturgy of faith making visible a beauty beyond mortal sight. We have come here on earth to learn; our philosophy must be a world-wide eclecticism. Past eclectics have compiled their systems from human philosophies; our wisdom will include the philosophy of the mountains and streams; what these stand for we shall aim at—their strength and patience, their striving towards one end, namely, the symmetry of things organic and inorganic.

DOES it not seem incredible that even one of all the striving and brow-beaten souls at war on this earth should have its beginning and end in a short cycle of years or centuries? Yet hundreds of wise men and books tell me that I have only just come into existence, that my age can be reckoned in orbits of the earth and phases of the moon. I ask them how they know that I did not exist when the

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| <p>CHAPTER II</p> <p>The paths of Beauty</p> | <p>earth was a gaseous vortex, and they laugh pitifully. But their laughter does not explain anything. Meanwhile I am assured by my longings which nothing transient or mortal can assuage, by the lives of men to whom temporal honours are almost unendurable, by the friendship which shall laugh at death, that no man, unless he desires it, is of a race merely earthly: I am not, as that all-sufficing materialism will tell me, haled up from deep-sea silence into the shouting turmoil of breakers, and flung back, a sinking relic, with the next ebb-tide. A man may prate to me of apes and evolution, but he is telling me no great marvel; let him show me the perspective beyond evolution, and I will be his slave.</p> <p>THE noblest heroisms, epics, transcendentalisms, are only bubbles in the broad wake of destiny; yet what loveliness they have, what colours, what—in the most literal sense of the word—what an iridescence! and each of them reflects the whole world. For there is one meaning alike in the voyages of Columbus and the quest of the San Graal; there is one compelling power in modern</p> |

science and in the search for the philosopher's stone. Dante and Omar sang no different songs ; Napoleon and Saint Francis of Assisi trod the same path only to a different measure — the one iron-shod, the other shuffling along barefoot. What, then, means this warfare of Christ with Mahomet, of Reason with Faith, of Baron with Peasant ? There is no royal road to the true and the beautiful ; there are but innumerable bypaths, over the mountain, where the hermit has beaten a track in the snow, under the trees, where Nature sits writing her pastorals—all leading to one end—rather, all leading in the same direction towards an unattainable, because infinite, perfection. By every creed and by every negation, by peace and strife, by enthusiasms and cynicisms, by hymns to Dahana, the rosy-fingered, and to Mary, the 'woman clothed with the Sun, and the Moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars,' man has drawn nearer to the face of beauty and the quickening heart of truth. Let a man have his fetish, if he will ; let him bow down to it, though it be a Priapus : for out of the inevitable satiety which awaits him whose Gods are

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born not of his higher but of his lower nature will come forth an acuter hearing, a vision more delicate, a wider desire. We who live to-day, we who have seen monarchy spurn democracy and democracy trample on kings, who have watched invention added to invention, and creed superimposed upon creed—we can see that the trend of history is always forward, that the strongest back-water is part of the stream.

NOW those who have drunk of the elixir of Plotinus know his saying that every beauty has its shaping and perfecting soul. They know that apart from a soul noble and, as it were, high-born there can be no enduring beauty—so that we must see many generations of pure and noble ancestry pass away before we reach beauty either of intellect or of body : and that in beauty something lies beyond what the eye can see and the tongue can speak of. It is this something beyond, common to all beautiful trees and flowers and grasses and rocks and animals, which gives them their form, draws us to them, makes us their kin. If not this, what is it that gives

them their hold upon us? What is their magic? It is not symmetry, as has often been alleged and disproved; certainly it is nothing fortuitous. I love the spruce and the poplar; I would spend countless lives in watching them in wind and rain and sun, at twilight and at midday. Symmetry, you say? Perspective acting as a narcotic on the eye? I have as strong a love for the yew: is that, too, born of symmetry? And as to what corresponds to symmetry in colour, is that always beautiful? In the end we must admit something utterly irreducible to terms; beauty is still 'x,' the unknown, the all-important, tangible to some degree in material things, but most of all in the word and deed of her worshippers. For the noble men and true women of whom we read and dream hold us solely by reason of their being each a facet to catch one or another of the lights of beauty; as, this one the steadfastness, that one the striving, and this one again the calm. Yet it seems sometimes that when we have gone as pilgrims to this and that human shrine of beauty, to the mind of Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus—to poets in words, to poets in form and colour,

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and to the saints, who are poets in act—
and when in place of that rare delight
under whose faintest shadow we have
not failed to weep and tremble we find
sketches ruder than the scratchings of the
cave-dweller on his wall, we feel some-
thing of the barrenness which stretches
across the world for the bereaved lover.
Quomodo sedet sola Civitas!

Beauty and
self-rule

BUT then by that fortunate irony
which makes known to us the ful-
ness of our adoration only when the
Beloved is taken away, we draw nearer
to what seems to be eternally lost. In a
desperate and auspicious hour we learn
to look at beauty in the chastened spirit
required of her stainless knights; we have
been schooled in her laws of chivalry;
we know at last that the mere dying with
her name on our lips is a destiny glori-
ously fulfilled. We can understand Em-
erson when he says: 'What we love, that
we have; but by desiring we bereave
ourselves of the love.' We cannot see
beauty face to face, but only through a
thousand veils; what we see we cannot
analyse or describe. Even before these
grosser manifestations of beauty of which

our senses are now susceptible it happens that our oaths and superlatives pale like lamps in the dawn: we are elated and inarticulate: we hang aloft over the worlds, poised between a rhapsody and a lament.

‘**I**N heaven,’ said Swedenborg, ‘the angels are advancing continually to the springtime of their youth, so that the oldest angel appears the youngest.’ It is so with what we call the beautiful—an angel or messenger who was before Swedenborg, before philosophy, and who to each generation of men as they awake is contemporary and playmate and lover, if they will. Eternally young and fair, eternally wise, is this beauty, like the Gods; infinitely diverse, infinitely approachable, whether by Platonism, by the Christ-spirit, by the contemplation of the mystic, or by mere aptness of temper—by a family resemblance, as it might be said, to that Idea of beauty whose kinship men have claimed from time to time in all ages, and by intuition of its ways. As for this last, may it not be the truest way of approach—at least the readiest, most susceptible of moods? It is thus that

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beauty showed her form, half-veiled, to most of the rare men and women beside whom we feel ourselves to be so earthy and who have gone so much farther than we, so that we seem to be cripples, hunchbacked, shamblers, hardly reckoned of the same pilgrimage, hardly pilgrims at all — perhaps, rather, loafers at the road-crossings, with a mind to turn aside into every green meadow.

Mysticism
and the
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THAT wandering of the mind over the high places of Christianity which we vaguely call mysticism is a tracking of the footsteps of this same Idea of beauty along one of its numberless paths. The religion of the mystics of every period and of every creed has all the ardencies of youth — vigour and longing, poetry, wonder, grace ; it has ever been the lyrical note in holiness, the reanimation of languescent faith. It is restless, for its night-visions and waking thoughts are all one, and that is no worship which can ever sleep ; rather is true worship (again I will add, either of a God, or a Lover, or an Ideal) that which is with us in our hours of watching, and which, when we have passed

beyond the border into the country of dreams, or (a little farther) into the valley of death, is waiting for us there also. The lives of those who climbed to the heights familiar to the sweet transcendentalist of Patmos and to him who was called 'the minnesinger of the love of God' were full of a perpetual surprise. In the world of the senses men say that there is nothing new; in this supersensuous world there is nothing old, yet everything has been from infinite ages before the nebular birth of the world. For the experience of the mind is endless; and though it is sometimes sought in a round of passive and sentimental exaltations traversed again and again with the same yet seeming new delight, as by most of the saints of Italy and Spain, yet it is sometimes seen as a spiral whose base is set on the earth, its flights growing steeper to infinity and permitting neither repetition nor backward look. This hunger for the divine, the ultimate beauty is more than a dull longing: it is the voracity, the keen desire, of one who, rescued from starvation, is allowed so meagre a diet as only stirs the appetite to cry out afresh. The mind can never

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know satiety, for as its desire is infinite, the highest delight to which it can attain has a beyond, just as on earth man can never reach the horizon.

THE saint of Christianity has generally been fated to pay his visit to this earth like an unwilling guest and slip away unnoticed ; we see him, but do not trouble to speak to him : suddenly someone notices a gap in the noisy circle, and finding no one to fill it gracefully, we dress up a dummy, call it by his name, and canonise it; then to the symposium again, for 'To-morrow,' says the fool who sat next to our saint, 'to-morrow we die.' Yet the saint is the lure of analytic minds, and their despair. He makes havoc of preconceptions : he contemns classification. He comes to earth for the briefest moment and is cursed and heckled: he leaves mankind stupidly agape as after a vanished aurora. There can be no forecast of the coming of these eccentric orbs; as they cross the dark centuries they leave a trail of fire which we examine telescopically and regretfully as our only available link with a curious portent. They are so wildly fascinating to us

because at heart we are all mystics. You are impatient of this life which we call finite. You long for more than a mortal love. Your dreams are concerned with eternity and space, your waking thoughts with your dreams. Then you are already of kin to the mystic spirit; its loveliness will not be a matter of indifference to you, and its infinity will not be intangible.

THE age is at last drawing to an end, when man's location of himself as it were on a temple pinnacle, overlooking prostrate Nature, was an integral part of his faith. We have passed through the epoch of baseless authority and are passing through that of baseless dissent. We have abandoned the artificial asceticism which is the fairest aspect of all the dualist creeds, and we are approaching as a hardly discovered country the fresh and inevitable asceticism of Nature. The self-conscious and almost euphuistic garb in which the monastic ideal has appeared in conjunction with religious beliefs is to be changed for a virtue without Puritanism, an austerity without maceration or fast. It was because the saintliness of medieval Christianity put out its own

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eyes that it perished and is met now only in one rare mind here and there: it is because the saintliness latent in all organic life is before everything keen of sense to the beauties of sense that it is destined to override every successive army of theologies. History shows us its pools of semi-stagnation fed and emptied by the occasional torrents of progress, and cries to us that only a new faith can give a new impulse. The birth of Christianity came when the more irrational Gods of Hellas and Rome were discredited and held in derision; the birth of empiricism when reason had grown stiff in the fetters of the school-men; the birth of naturalism comes at a time when senescent Christianity is leaving us—has already left us—stripped of all fellowship with the Gods. The present is a time of plumbing and proving, and of plumbing especially the depths of theosophies and proving the warrants of authority. As we pass through the deepest valleys of nihilism (and pass we must, unless we would go back to the picturesque enigmas which puzzled medieval minds, for the human mind at all costs will ever be thinking), we learn to know the roots of the faiths

which rise above us on all sides like cold, white mountains of unearthly height and design; and having studied the embryology of religion we shall distinguish what is permanent and noble in the Idea of worship from what is transient and foul. As the onset of empirical science cleared the way for speculation, so nihilism, a flying column of negations, must clear the way for a new and purified ideal. We can raise no lasting fabric upon the ruins of crumbled beliefs. No precaution must be forgotten which shall prevent a recrudescence of superstition, no measure neglected which shall help on the development of broad, hale philosophy. Not but that its teaching will be found to come into line in a greater or less degree with every primitive instinct and every developed article of belief which men have held; for all creeds, even the most artificial, have sprung in the beginning from a contemplative awe in the presence of natural objects and powers. Let it be granted that the religion called by the name of the Christ is in purity and sublimity the noblest of all religions which have yet risen to greatness; but look at Christianity in the light of the religion

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which is still to come, and it is foul and subsimious. But our knowledge of Nature is even now so limited and our love for her of so recent, although so gradual, a growth, that it seems to me there can scarcely, until half a century ago, have been material to form such a character as shall express at once the chastity and sensuous receptiveness which are parallel veins running through all organic existence, and which have been vainly set at right angles by a monastic misdevelopment of the worshipping instinct in man. Let me say at once that I do not mean the ideals encased in monasticism to be derided. They are among the noblest of all ideals which circumstance has yet driven the mind of man to spin; they became ignoble only by being appropriated as supports to the tottering Christian mythology which affected to be above and was, therefore, in conflict with Nature.

Monasticism

PERHAPS it is necessary here to guard against a misunderstanding. I shall be told that the monastic ideal was born of Christianity in its vigour and not adopted by Christianity in its old age; in other words, that monasticism was the

direct offspring of the religion founded by Christ, and that this religion was not dependent upon the monastic ideal for what is called a new lease of life. In answer to such objections it is sufficient to call attention to the substrata of Platonism, Kabbalism, and Sufism underlying the mystic and speculative ideas of the cloister, and to the strictly parallel ideas of self-annihilation inflicted on the fleshly Ego and the consequent final merging of the individual in the All-Soul which inspire the similarly misdirected asceticism of the East ; and, secondarily, to imagine (as far as that is possible) a mediæval Europe without monks, without monasteries, and therefore without either charity, or saint, or literature, or art, and to imagine an illiterate and unprogressive Christianity set to deal with a continent of princes brutalised by hereditary power and mobs vicious by uneducated instinct. The briefest contemplation of the Christian world before and after the monastic period is enough to show that the epoch was one of temporarily arrested decay.

It is not strange, though, perhaps, generally unsuspected, that monasticism, like every spell which man has laid upon the

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world, has its type and counterpart in Nature. It is so often forgotten that to her as the mother of ideals we ought to pay our reverence for the great victories over ugliness, the high thoughts, whether aimed at or fully achieved, the world-conquering institutions, which are each 'the lengthened shadow of one man.' It is forgotten that without light a man can throw no shadow; the light which throws across the ages the shadow of Saint Antony streams from the face of Nature.

EVEN with the knowledge which has been piled up on the subject by ethnology and comparative philology, it is still necessary to ask ourselves, What is religion? Whence is this vitality of dead superstitions, this power over the world wielded by men whom the world (in practice, if not always in theory) has agreed to call madmen?

Thomas Hammerchen, I am told, was no better than an idiot in practical affairs, even if he did write the *De Imitatione Christi*, which, perhaps, he did not; yet thousands of men and women have been moved even to tears by this same book, and hundreds of thousands will be moved

to tears in the future. Religion, it seems, is not yet quite exanimate, and may be studied with profit. Once again, whence comes that clear call which few hear more than once or twice on earth, borne towards us and beyond, a bell-note on the swell of a breeze—the summons of a Power, wiser than are we, to cleanse ourselves of the mire—social, political, and individual—which clings to us in our momentary flight through Time? I have never ceased to remember a childish experience, terrible in its earnestness, in its sweetness more luxurious than any pleasure of the senses, which opened my eyes at the age of six or seven years to the beauty and wonder of the loveliest poem ever conceived by the mind of man—the poem of the idea of Christ and Christianity. I did not know then, as I know now, that this epic was not the work of a single mind, as was *Paradise Lost*, but of generations; I knew nothing of the countless visions of obscure monks and nuns, each vision adding a new lustre to the radiant figure clothed in the broideries of a world's imagination in such a manner that, like the great solar myths of the Aryan nations, the idea of

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Christ may be considered as a poem wrought by the whole civilized world. But I felt then, as I shall never feel again, that during that instant's rapture of sorrow and burden of ethereal joy I had touched a hand stretched in an impulse of the most passionate love and pity from somewhere behind the silences of stellar space. Suggested by I know not what tenuous chain of thought, this sudden lull in the uproar of existence came upon me in the midst of some childish games upon a Sunday evening in winter; and, as in a large company of people, all talking at once, a sudden and universal silence produces a kind of nervous shudder, so now I suffered a Panic tremor of delicious affright. I ran out of the house, which was full of light and movement; outside, where I half hoped, half feared, and wholly expected to meet him whom I had lovingly been taught to adore as the son of God, I found only darkness and heard only what seemed as the contrite sighing of the grass and trees. That the darkness was peopled by myriads of beings with pitiful eyes, and that the trees sighed in sympathy with a heart that was never again to know

even a moment of such ineffable joy, was a consolation hidden from me until many years afterwards, when time had softened some of the bitterness of exile for ever from all such luxuries of spiritual life. For all these years I remembered only that once, 'in a moment of time, in the twinkling of an eye,' I had seemed to hear vibrating to some inner sense the same voice which said ages ago by the shore of the little Galilean sea, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' I think that I felt then something of the nature of that which I cannot even now analyse: I mean what William Law speaks of when he says, 'This is that instinct of goodness, attraction of God, or witness of himself in the soul of every man, which without arguments and reasonings rises up in the soul.' Since then, when I have thought of that strange figure, so sweetly feminine, yet of so lofty and unwavering hardihood; of such settled melancholy, and so lavish of joy to the simple folk who alone were wise enough almost to understand him; playing so great a part upon so paltry a stage; then I have wondered whether across any other world than this has fallen, in the dawn of

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its wisdom and hope, that same mysterious shadow of the cross.

Solitude

IHAVE found that solitude strips the soul and leaves it defenceless, but also unshackled. In the first Ennead of Plotinus we may read, 'To those that go up to the holy celebrations of the mysteries there are appointed purifications and the laying aside of the garments worn before and the approach in nakedness; until, passing on the upward path all that is other than the God, each in the loneliness of himself beholds that lonely-dwelling Being, the Apart, the Single, the Pure.' So it happens when the surrender of the mind to the dim-peopled world of solitude is accomplished: at every step the trammelling robes of self-indulgence and self-deceit fall away in rags; and when we remember that among men these rags were blessed and honoured as the purple of kings, it sometimes seems that after all we have chosen the fool's portion and foregone such pleasure as the world gives, only to be a laughing-stock to our own nature. But this is not so. The rewards of this fair lady Solitude, even to those who serve

her but for an hour, are perennial. To turn from her is to turn from immensity to puerilities, from the comradeship of the stars to acquaintance with foulness and vice. On the other hand, every hour spent in her shadow is a regeneration; the sights which cross the vision and the thoughts which invade the mind during complete abandonment to the influence of solitude leave prints indelible by the wear of centuries. In solitude I meet my own vileness face to face; it is there that I am able to overthrow this elusive *doppelganger* who hitherto has been my master. There at length the phantoms and silhouettes which once passed for realities fade away in the light of self-knowledge; the acts which once were stupendous lose their stature; the thoughts which were refulgent are seen to wane and grow pale. We are confronted with the necessity of countless revisions of judgment: he who would be solitary must above all men think for himself; 'what everyone believes is *never* true.' The solitary man proves himself to be of the lineage of Ishmael in every thought; even in the world of ideas, in the comradeship of the chosen teachers in his

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library, he must bow down to no dogma, nor suffer his mind to lie at ease beneath the caress of rhythmic language nor to swoon under the spell of alien philosophies. The turn of a phrase which delights the ear for a day, the fabric raised by a musing intellect which delights the reason for a few scores of centuries, are such meteoric phenomena as the mind may reflect upon to give point to their evanescence, but to which it may offer no allegiance and from which it must accept no bias of judgment. Though your philosophy be fairer than the Taj Mahal and more firmly grounded than the Pyramids, as a hard and fast rule I will have none of it. I will admit that the mind must needs be thrilled at the touch of a Plato, as the body at the touch of a loved hand; the voice of a saint, heard across centuries, not less than the voice of a lover, heard across a garden of flowers, falls too musically upon the heart to awake no echo of answering song. By the gift of enthusiasm, our divinest possession, we are not permitted to be indifferent to the least of the emanations of beauty. Of man we may say,

'Son cœur est un luth suspendu;
Sitôt qu'on le touche, il résonne.'

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The Roman who wrote in the sad-
cadenced metre of Sappho the rapturous
misery of passion,

'Lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
Flamma demanat, sonitu suo
Tintinnant aures geminae, teguntur
Lumina nocte,'

and the Florentine who, though he
taught the world to love, made also this
confession,

'E s' i' levo gli occhi per guardare,
Nel cor mi si comincia un terremoto,
Che l' anima da' polsi fa partire,'

spoke, it is certain, no more than the
truth; and they spoke of that kind of
beauty which over the minds of noble
men and of true women has the least
power, the beauty of a mortal form. Far
less transient, far more potent in its sway
over the loftiest and most insular of man-
kind, are those waves of intellectual
emotion which pass over us when we
stand before some splendour of human
art, or hear through dreams some rainfall
of human music, or read in books the
thoughts which, a thousand years after
the vanishing of their thinkers, have not

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hilarity'

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ceased to vibrate. Of these waves, which are the swell of a past storm in a greater mind than ours, we may hear the thundered message and wonder at the majesty, but we must not suffer ourselves to be borne away upon their flood. A man must pass through his youth's *wanderjahre* among the ghosts of philosophies and the ruins of faiths, but let him remember always that he stands as it were at Hillah and Mosul, which once were Babylon and Nineveh. Among these *eidola* of philosophy, the tottering memories of a former grandeur, let him walk as under the constellations, which of old were called eternal; it is not to such that he may sacrifice his mind's autocracy. With her myriad voices Nature calls us to be up and thinking; the gods, the heroes, the saints, and each of all the prophetic voices of the world echo this cry alone. And why am I to consult authorities for my ethics or my belief? If my ethics fulfil Nature's high purpose, they can never be superseded; if they ignore her laws, I and my race are inevitably punished. In neither case can any religion or system of thought affect my destiny; a man is not handsome because his clothes are fashionable, nor

noble because he is a Hindoo or a Christian. A dominant religion and a sartorial craze pass away in about the same length of time — the latter in a few weeks, the former in a few centuries; in eternity the difference is nonexistent.

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Perspective

HEREIN, then, lies the benediction of the lady Solitude: for those who love her she equates the Past with the Future and the Present with both; history and prophecy and the stream of current events are judged by the same standard, for all are equidistant. Under those grave eyes of hers it is not possible to be carried away by the storms of fanaticism, or moved by a breath of self-deceit; in loneliness we learn the stability of the mind. The moving tapestry upon which kings and queens are seen to act their solemn pageantries passes under the eyes of the lonely watcher and leaves him unmoved — passes *aus der Ewigkeit zu der Ewigkeit hin*, yet never out of his ken. For the earth-groveller intent on gain there is neither Past nor Future; for the dweller in solitary place there is no Present. At no moment does he say, 'Now is prophecy being verified,' or, 'Now are actions pass-

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ing into history ; ' he sees clearly that, before he has spoken, the prophecy is fulfilled, the actions are historical. In loneliness a man takes of existence as it were a bird's-eye view ; he surveys the world as might a spirit afloat in space or a fabulous inhabitant of the moon. Standing at a distance from earth, he has attained the focus of all thought and notional experience, can see the paltriness of the most long-sighted statesmanship, and know the established creed of centuries to be a momentary phase as transient as the phases of Venus, and like hers, ever recurrent, though in worlds other than our own.

The tragedy
of wasted
intellect

SOME years ago it was my affectation to think that my favourite study was the tragedy of wasted intellect. I quoted to myself the dead sciences of astrology and alchemy and the instances of Raymond Lull, who discovered a key to universal knowledge and was murdered by the Moors whom he thought to enlighten, of Michael Scot, who foretold by magic art the exact hour and place and manner of his death, yet did not escape dying as he had predicted, and of Cornelius

Agrippa, who in his youth wrote an exhaustive treatise upon occult science and in his age a treatise upon *The Vanity of all Arts and Sciences* whatsoever. The subject is now, as then, one upon which I often dwell ; no longer, however, as a pessimistic reverie, but as a paradox in optimism. For since then it has become clear to me that the musing hierarchy whose wisest watched from the towers of the Babylonian desert the majestic motion of the constellations could not have been better employed, nor the searchers for elixir and the stone of philosophers have gained a possession more priceless than their enthusiasm. As we are happy, so is the good that we do in the world ; no miserable man ever benefited the race. The tragedy of wasted intellect is for me, then, no longer a tragedy, though ironical still, and now with a twofold irony ; for that, which to the Chaldeans and to the Middle Ages seemed wisdom, to us seems foolishness, and was nevertheless wisdom after all ! For, surely, that is wise which best fits us for enduring bravely and nobly achieving ; must we not, therefore, treasure those two gifts (which are like beautiful twin children)

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Life no more
than a mo-
mentary con-
templation

of our lady Mother called enthusiasm and contemplation? For by contemplation and steady labour and the receptivity of a mind schooled in enthusiasm we discern reflected in our hearts, as in a sheltered pool, such starry worlds as the stream never dreams of; for the rush and froth of our so-called society gives back no light from the brightest of skies. These worlds and constellations of thought, as they move across our zenith in the night of uncertainty, are sufficient to sustain our patience and to lighten our hearts for this present moment of time; in the few days or few years which divide each of us from death it may happen that we shall be nearer to their origin and truth—perhaps that we shall hardly escape blindness from their light. Such glimpses of the mind's faeryland which come to us in a solitary life serve at least to sustain our faith and lend their colour to our ideals. Without them our outlook is upon mere light and shade: we may gaze at the world and profess to admire it, but in reality we see it only as a lunar landscape; it is colourless, because we have taken away its atmosphere. Moreover, who that has not sometimes lost his way

and followed innumerable Will-o'-the-wisps ever reached the goal of his desire?

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THAT pregnant Laconism, 'Know thyself' (said to be heaven-sent), brings forth its abundant fruit only in solitude. Yet our apotheosis of solitude is utterly vain as long as we have for companion that earthy-minded part of our nature upon which the saints heaped curses not all unjustly. Until we have purged away all dross of wealth and vulgarity, we know nothing of the value of solitude; until we have cast away the stained garments, beloved of the whole world, called social duties, we may visit Eleusis, but we see no mysteries. Solitude will yield herself only to the pure-hearted; to the world-befouled, though most wildly penitent, she can be only tenderly pitiful. For those who go to her wearing a mask there is no help, but rather temptation to self-destruction. You remember the woods of Westermain?

The woods of
Westermain

'Enter these enchanted woods
You who dare.'

ABOVE all things, honesty is demanded if a man is to benefit by

Singleness
of heart

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being solitary. Throw up the business of deceiving others and turn to deceiving yourself—what gain is that? It would be far better for a man to go on with his cheating and money-making, for there is said to be satisfaction in that, and by force of habitual repetition of commercial maxims a man may almost come to believe them. But if we wish to carve a soul to fairness and not to dishonour, let us remember that solitude is Nature's own cool hand on the human brow, and that of all imbecilities Nature most detests a lie. It has ever been her privilege to offer favours with one hand and to take them away with the other: in our simplicity we call this the irony of fate, seeing in it nothing of the perversity of man, nothing of the justice of Nature, who gives and takes with the logic of a pair of scales. Dishonesty, applauded as astuteness in business life, is moral suicide when solitude makes it a self-deception; a lie then (when the world is behind your back at last) is a leap seaward with a millstone at your neck.

Perspective
transcenden-
talised

MEN speak and write of Alexander, of Hannibal, of Napoleon, as not

only heroes but almost as demigods. Well! a man has conquered a state, an empire, a world. One world? Only one? And we make him a hero? But we are to fit ourselves for the conquest of innumerable worlds. We stand here in the palaestra of great minds; our Shakespeares and Napoleons are giants, but in their hobble-dehoyhood. We must not be loungers, idle spectators of their discipline and toil; into the bout with the rest, where defeat itself is a glory!

MOREOVER, though this hour is to be spent in sowing, it is a seed-time which is its own harvest. It is our fortune to taste here the first fruits of what we planted with our eyes bent on eternity; and looking along the pointed finger of analogy, we can guess what we are to reap hereafter from what we see here as half-grown. The spirit of change, flux, progress, which rules as a moon the tides of nations, shouts us a warning that the sowing and reaping are co-eternal. So far from our bringing nothing into the world and carrying nothing out, we both bring and carry away all things; we lay down nothing but our bodies, and these

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as easily as a workman lays down his tool, his other hand already taking up another and more serviceable. How can a man dull and worn with age cling to his blunted edge of a life, when the finest tempered steel is ready to his hand? Men say, 'A bird in the hand —' that slug-gard's proverb!

Age

THAT man who has neither whined for death nor clung to life has said the last word upon existence; he has shown a fallacy in creeds and no-creeds. He believes nothing, is ready to believe all things; he stands for empiricism in metaphysic, for a firm base upon which to pile experience. His philosophy is no fabric, but an accretion; he passes through a life and it leaves a deposit of truth. That which we learn in our three-score years is the paltriest knowledge; we are yet at our schooling. Our idea of the universe is worth as much and as little as a child's opinion of Catullus. It may be our fate (who knows how soon?) to develop instincts as inconceivable to us now as is the instinct of generation to a child. In our moments or epochs of senile depression let us remember that

we are only half-grown; we must outgrow many senilities. Our immediate object, so far as concerns this passing phase of existence, should be so to live that we may stand erect both in mind and body in our old age. Whenever we depart from Nature's plan and purpose, we add another chance to the possibilities of our becoming mentally and physically cripples. A man should stand in his age like Odysseus among the suitors — with his tattered illusions fallen away and his mind stripped for conflict with whatever may be his next foe. An old man whose mind and bodily frame alike condemn support, who can still hold aloof from the narcotism of religious faiths, is immeasurably the most sublime of all spectacles which humanity can show. But it is given to few of our frail race to retain the clear autonomy of thought until the hour of death. The more sound and healthy the body, the slower, commonly, is its decline, so that sickly persons are the most likely to be in full possession of the powers of reasoning at the time of death. Nevertheless, it is good to make it our aim to cling fast to the ideals of our maturity, nor suffer for a moment

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Its sublimities and
absurdities

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IIAge a greater
calamity
than death

that cowardice which at the supreme hour flies for comfort—yes, *for comfort!*—to religion. For such comfort will benumb the reason and fetter the free will: it is the intellectual counterpart of drugs and alcohol. What a pathetic spectacle is man commonly when his body's puny strength forsakes it and his hair begins to whiten! What a sorry, dyspeptic Silenus, babbling now of by-gone feasts and loves, now mumbling ill-remembered prayers! The Past, in long and lurid perspective, and the Future, already slipping into the Past, rise alternately before him with his varying moods, the latter bringing with it a flood of too tardy devotion. How hastily they come tumbling out, these neglected petitions, treading hard upon each other's heels in pitiable confusion, for the time is all too short! The schoolboy with an unprepared lesson is hardly in more tragic plight: surely, there is no sadder nor more ridiculous sight in all our brief comedy. Yet it is absurd as well as cruel to say to a man who has lost his physical vigour, 'You can be strong at least in mind.' Our mental health is as much and as little under our control as bodily health; and when age comes with its blurring of

fine distinctions and its torpor of the senses, when the tense strife of existence slowly gives place to one long dream, and there is neither true waking nor true sleep, then all firmness and all ideals are dormant as they were in the untaught child. The keen glance has become a flicker : the masterful will has forgotten how to frame a command ; it inspires no more terror than the mummy of a Pharaoh, at whose word nations once trembled. There is, then, clearly a duty laid upon us (and by that I mean simply that it is due to ourselves) to put on *now* the habit of thought which we should wish to be wearing in death, since in age we cannot initiate any new thoughts or ideals. That this habit of thought will be overlaid in our minds by concerns purely temporary and trivial need not make us think of such preparation as a useless labour. Our old ideals will be with us, encased in a chrysalis; they will be our last waking thoughts before we sink to sleep, and so it may chance that they will shape our first vision of the more than earthly dawn.

TO the dwellers far beyond the outskirts of a country town the bells

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The intangible ideas —

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of the great churches, with a clamouring chorus from lesser belfries, peal out across the rolling country, over fold, over fallow, confused in a tempest of echo and chime. The fusillade of the small bells, the cannonade of the great, the volleys and file-firing and detonation of mingling peals that spring into space from haze-blue spires as the clocks strike six on Sunday evening, never fail to bring home to me the same ideas of power and solemnity as are suggested to every human mind by the thunder, which is the reverberant hammer of Thor and the voice of Zeus in the council of the Immortals. As in the waves of the sea, so in these roaring billows of sound, you may hear now the *ululatus* of fiends, now the antiphon of archangels.

— of infinity
in time
and space

SUCH — are they not? — are our human ideas of eternity and infinity; of that to which man has given so many shapeless forms and which he has so long foolishly worshipped under so many foolish names; of that in which (for aught that I can tell) my own lady may now have sounded the profoundest deeps and ranged the remotest distances; of that which (for

aught that I can tell) may still be to her the same insoluble riddle that it is to you and to me. The very words—infinity—eternity—are just such a roll of thunder in the mind; our thoughts about them reach a terrific grandeur, a chill and Alpine sublimity, yet they are nothing but echoes following each other with thousandfold reduplication. At the moment when death came to the Blessed Fina, Virgin of San Gimignano and Spouse of Christ, all the bells of the churches in the town were set ringing with a sweeter than mortal harmony. They were touched by no human hands; they were heard in the streets, and far out on the hillsides the peasant folk rested from their toil to gaze with mild perplexity towards the city of a hundred towers. Our ideas of such transcendental notions as eternity are this same super-mortal harmony, heard so rarely, never understood. We ourselves cannot grasp the noblest of our thoughts, so volatile are they, so full of sinuous variations which lead us somewhere beyond the limits of comprehension. In the end the floating vision is crystallised—and meagre. We have learned that it cannot be otherwise: there are soft, grey

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outlines, the poetry of dawn; afterwards, common daylight, and on the horizon a little cloud of disillusionment. So have fared many, nay, most of our strivings after the mind's phantasmal desires — strivings whether of saint or philosopher, of mystics orthodox or delirious. Yet I may hear all that a man can tell me of eternity in the shouts and wailing of a sea cave. If I want a definition of the infinite, I shall go not to a priest, but to a hill-top from which I may look down into the eyes of the dawn.

III

Love

I LEANED upon the parapet of a church tower and looked downward into a darkness splashed with the pallor of monumental stones, upward into the spangled veil of the stars which is the veil of my lady; and the voice of my lady, whom her relations call dead, spoke to me. 'Alas, poor dreamer!' she said, 'so hard ridden by your dreams!'

Coma
Berenices

THAT patch like an asphodel meadow, lying in space between Leo

and Boötes, and called Berenice's hair, is love's symbol set among the stars. I need not tell at length that sad tale with happy ending—how, when Ptolemy Euergetes left his kingdom for a savage and bloodthirsty war, he left also his queen Berenice of flame-yellow hair and tender devotion; how she sorrowed over his memory, for no news came from the army, nor any token; how, at last, she shore away the fine gold from her head, and hung it up before the altars of the gods; how it was stolen, and Ptolemy returned; how he raged over the doubly sacrilegious theft; how the astronomer Konon, like the ready-witted Hellene that he was, saved the lives of the temple's priests by taking the wedded lovers to the palace roof and showing them where the lady Berenice's tresses hung in the ebony sky of that old Egyptian night; and how they believed him implicitly, for they were not astronomers, and were not the gods ever gracious to them that loved faithfully? So Berenice and her king have become immortal among the nations: think you that besides this pair no man and woman ever loved in that ancient world? On the contrary, a name written among

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the stars perishes, but a name written in the heart of a man or a woman endures. In some few millions of centuries the threads of cosmic gold will grow dim and be seen no more; our earth will forget its dynasty of Ptolemies, the heavens will know no *Coma Berenices*; but do you think that Berenice is forgotten, or that Berenice forgets?

The universal
transcenden-
talist

THE lover speaks beyond the senses and his whisper is audible across centuries. Life is nothing to him, nor death either; by loving he has put them both among the trivialities. You may hear him sigh, if for anything, for such trial as man never yet endured—for persecution bitterer than any martyrdom and tortures more refinedly cruel than screw or rack—why? That he may prove his right to be scornful of earthlings and their pains, for, if of their pains, then also of their sensualities. As a boy looks forward to manhood as to a time when he shall repeat with a greater freedom and intensity of pleasure the happiest games of childhood, so the lover looks beyond life and beyond death for the fulfilment of that passion which dur-

ing our momentary dalliance in time can never grow out of its infancy. He overrides the aeons of time and stands aloft above eternity; behind him and before are countless lovers made visible: behind, the lovers, so noble! of all history; before, the lovers, yet nobler, who still are to come: behind, how great an army! before, a vista of shadowy armies, host upon host, multitude surging upon multitude, with faces all upturned under starlight — the glow of the stars which we see and the glare of the stars which lie beyond mortal sight. Such an assemblage of his kindred stretching away below an infinite horizon is the lover, and he alone, privileged to see and dream upon.

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THE heavens are calmed, the night lit with auroral glow, to him who rises above the cloud-scud of obscuring Time with its microscopic fact and event and desire. He cannot walk, as other men, merely beneath the stars, but in their company; swung between heaven and earth, he is above all passions save that one tumultuous stillness of love. In so far as he is truly a lover, he may despise the world and yet be no egoist, de-

The universal
poet

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ride facts and institutions without being a visionary. He cannot fail to be in some sort a poet, or 'creator,' whose song is the growth of his own soul and its reaction upon a fairer. Test the world's lovers by this standard, and most will fall short of it; nevertheless, it is the standard to which the lovers in all history have in some degree striven to attain.

The universal
prophet

YOU may say, if you are this true lover, that the beauty of the sun's setting is *her* beauty, and that the very talk of the dead leaves is concerning *her*: to look in the book of Nature is to find *her* story written and her anciently emblazoned heraldry. She is immortal, if God and the universe are immortal; for she herself is the universe, and she is God. The saying of Christ is as true in her mouth as in his, 'I and my father are one.' The battle-shout of certain knights was, 'For God and my lady!' So the love of God would be no obstacle to the love of this his fair daughter, for in serving either the lover serves both.

A lover stalks the earth as a man among lay figures; he has the right, and he alone. The whole world is his unravished bride,

for in this his ideal of womanhood the whole world is, as it were, the animating soul. Away with boundaries and distinctions! They cramp a fine lover. The microcosm and the macrocosm are all one; they begin and end in one priceless soul. This lover knows no limits; he deals with infinities, and he can see nothing on this side of the horizon. For him the riddle of earth has solved itself; the very silence of infinite space is articulate in his ears. He comes to earth as the Gods did — for a brief sojourn in a corner of his demesne. Fetter him there, if you know how; the cunning of Hephaestus and the strength will scarcely avail, for a lover is stronger than the Immortals. His life is a triumphal progress; in his train the heroes and poets of all ages walk as captives, for he has superseded them all and put them all to use in the building of his own soul. What is noble for the philosopher, the artist in sounds or colours, the soldier, is noble for him also, inasmuch as he sums in himself all their nobilities. To the men of his own time and planet this triumph will seem a street-farce, this sublime gait no more than stagger; but let him know that he

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loves and that even for this cause alone he lives for all time. Never lover yet missed immortality ; can our sins be written in a book of God, as priests tell us, and not that love which made them hideous? Shall a hero in act be immortal, and a hero in all else be forgotten? Or shall not the singer live as well as his theme?

These two minds need express themselves by no language, whether of lip or of eye, but by the thought alone ; Harmony becomes the greatest of the Immortals, for by her grace they may free themselves of the cumbrance of speech, yet never cease to hold converse. Alas! for the mind which has no other to read its unwritten periods and understand its silences.

The universal
artist

THE poet, the philosopher, the mystic, are all potential lovers, and we, when we are ripe for love, are their worshippers. But when love actually comes, riding upon a gale, we have no thought for them again. What are Plato and Dante to us then? Where in our thoughts is the Helen of Homer or of Goethe? Then we are authors of Platonism as well

as readers, though we can barely enunciate a word clearly for the rush of our thoughts; every art is ours as much as Dante's, or Michael Angelo's, or Beethoven's, and every longing and thrill of half-attainment which the mystic knows we know also. We can see sympathetically with the optimist or with the pessimist at will; for to us all the world is a golden setting to one fair jewel, and apart from her it is bare and hideous. Thus it happens that no standpoint is amiss to us; we can rail at woman with Schopenhauer, or exalt her with Rossetti, for it is but one that we worship, and her we can justly neither praise nor blame.

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THE moment of love's awakening is full of discoveries and portents; long avenues of utterly new and interminable thought lie there, cleared of mist; the joy of a scholar over the dawning of light from obscured pages is a pallid likeness of the wild mirth wherewith a lover watches the vanishing of the shades which were wont to throng his starved and crepuscular existence. But to a lover are given also the clues which lead, this one to heaven, that one to hell; and not even

Birth-hour

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himself may always know the difference between them until the time of choosing has utterly gone by. There is darkest peril in the birth-hour of love, and dawning salvation. We of dim sight stand between clear vision and a thicker blindness; if we fail, we have foregone an unveiling of eternity. We come then to a crisis more than temporal; as we carry ourselves then, so are we shaping two souls to ugliness or to a beauty surpassing that of fairest bodily forms.

The flaming
heart

THE fact of my being a lover lifts me from the clay to magnificence; for a lover has wealth beyond the counting, can give generously, can bear all things with equanimity, even to the loss of her to whom he has given his worship, if that loss be merely by death. That most portentous scene in a life of portents, when the Christ (as it is related) ascended from the Mount of Olives to the sky, is reënacted in each of our lives when we are bereft of our best-beloved; for the lady of my heart cannot go from earth but in a cloud of glory, cannot have an end less glorious than the saints. The death of my lady must hallow us both:

her, because now no foulness can touch her memory; me, because the remembrance of her every and inmost thought will keep me purified. Moreover, from my servitude I have learned the language of the great among lovers; I am closer to Petrarca for having loved another Laura, to Dante for being thrall to another Beatrice; and is not every true woman rightly named Beatrice, 'she who holds the gift of blessing'? Let a man willingly suffer, if once he has loved, for now no fate can restore a balance of evil; though shame be piled upon sorrow, and fear upon pain, he can endure them all in the strength of remembered counsels from purest lips; to him the blessing of Lethe is a curse, for all power lies in memory — does she not act as bearer of messages from the lady's stilled heart?

WHEN we read the *Vita Nova*, we hear the call from the heights of a lover's idealism which no man, be he lover or not, can help at least longing to obey. In that tiny miracle of a book is found the sum of all earthly experience, or at least so much of it as is not infernal; its songs hold the germ of the *Para-*

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La Vita
Nova

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| <p data-bbox="241 223 342 269">CHAPTER III</p> <p data-bbox="231 625 355 696">* 'My lady is desired in the high heaven.'</p> <p data-bbox="241 966 344 1012">The Queen of Glory</p> | <p data-bbox="376 215 964 620"><i>diso.</i> In it we actually witness the metamorphosis of a good and beautiful woman into an eternal idea for worlds to dream upon ; the birth of the ideal Beatrice Portinari in the mind of Dante is an event, or, rather, a process comparable to the birth of the ideal Madonna in the mind of visionary medievalism. We find the pride which can say without vaunting,</p> <p data-bbox="441 645 897 676">‘Madonna è disiata in sommo celo,’*</p> <p data-bbox="376 710 964 1405">and the high veneration which knows the lordship of Love to be good, ‘in that he draws the mind of his faithful one from all worthless things.’ We read also this passage: ‘Now it fell on a day, that this most gracious creature was sitting where words were to be heard of the Queen of Glory.’ You or I would have spoken of our <i>beatrix</i> as sitting ‘in a church;’ not so the poet, far-sighted beyond the veils of sense. Where better can the lady pray, the lover watch, than where the triumph is being celebrated of temperance over the body’s desires? for in that ideal drama of Mary, Virgin of Nazareth, ‘Mother of the Fair Delight,’ the world’s lovers bear all a part.</p> |

Never yet lived the Christian woman who had no wish to be to her a daughter and a bower-maiden ; never yet fought stainless knight whose slumbers were not painted with his lady's features showing through Madonna's form. Herein is poets' glory, to wake the echoes in our minds by a hint, to show us our clay transfigured, dust shining as fine grains of gold. There 'where words were to be heard of the Queen of Glory,' where gazed her faithful from lofty niche, where minds rose upon her ritual to seek herself, the lover is to gaze upon his lady : what place more fitting, save, perhaps, a mountain-top under cloudless sky ? Thus are we shown that love and religion are but two sides of the Janus-faced idea of worship, the latter looking outwards from the gates of the heart, the former inwards to the heart's citadel and shrine. The impious mind cannot love ; the loveless mind cannot adore. Did the Semitic folk ever pray to Moloch ? They bawled at him, they slashed themselves, they devoted their children to the flames, but to pray was impossible to them. From Dante we learn that assuredly that is no prayer which can be spoken, or

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* 'Another
was just then
with me.'

Loneliness
and com-
panionship

* 'Abashed,
the pilgrim
spirit stands
at gaze.'

Arcturus

even thought; then only have we prayed, when we can say truly, 'Altre era teste mecho.' * Lastly, we sight the meaning of that utter loneliness in the apparent absence (by reason of what is called death) of the Beloved, which is yet happiness because it is deepest intercourse — a loneliness which may happen to be ours in actual experience also. 'La tua mirabile donna è partita di questo secolo.' So steadily in the hand of this godlike lover is the balance held between the trivial and the matter of real import; 'thy wonderful lady is no longer of this time,' knows now neither epochs, nor moons, nor birth-anniversaries, yet is she still Beatrice, 'giver of blessing.' She of whom it was said, while she was on earth, that no evil could bear her presence, has not gone utterly from sight; still, as in former days, is her salutation given, and still, as then, 'lo peregrino spirito la mira.' *

THAT star in the west sinking into the arms of the river-valley and reddened by the veils of the river fog is Arcturus; the beams which are falling on my eyes with the gentleness of dis-

tant candle-light left their blazing sun nearly one hundred and nine years ago, and during that time have been travelling at the rate of 186,000 miles to the second. Below Arcturus a cloud is rising from the horizon, and there must be a hurricane blowing in the upper strata of our atmosphere, for the speed of its approach is like that of a sandstorm. It is more than impressive, almost terrifying, this sight of a lonely cloud errant in night spaces, this silent, scudding hyperbole of darkness where all is dark: and now Arcturus has gone.

HERE I come to my moral. The presence of the heaviest and most intolerable misfortunes coming between a human mind and the passion which is to make it realise its own immortality is of no more consequence than is that Titan of writhing mists, who has now overspread half the sky, to the immemorial flare in the heavens which man has named Arcturus. We forget very easily, do we not? the pettiness of even the apparently stupendous among sublunary things. We forget that agonies the most horrible and sorrows the most bitterly

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Dust in the
balance

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| <p data-bbox="228 227 334 274">CHAPTER III</p> <p data-bbox="218 389 344 560">* I place them in ascending order of the magnitude of their effect on the heroic mind.</p> <p data-bbox="262 918 303 941">Pain</p> | <p data-bbox="365 218 954 867">corrosive are not only past, but forgotten, before the ray which is now leaving Arc-turus has reached the earth. What are worries to a lover? What are death, pain, dishonour,* to a mind conscious of its rectitude? They are still less to a heart conscious of its passion. Is not the longest Reign of Terror but a historical episode in a dozen centuries? If you are a lover, you are set above the worlds: as the moon was called Asterodia, 'she whose way lies among the stars,' so are you almost now—in a trice of years—set free to leave this earth to its jesting and to rise beyond death in company with the fair soul over whose beauty the aeons can throw no veil.</p> <p data-bbox="365 910 954 1405">BUT, as we learn so early and so sud-denly, it is folly to believe that there is no black underside to the Nature who broods over us, though she be like the loveliest of cumulus forms ever wrought by wooing wind. It is the dark side of the cloud, threatening horrors, that we find eternally most visible, hiding the airy pinnacle and glowing wall. The gloom and awful, uplifted hand of Nature is no dream; the angel above the threshing-floor of Ornan, the bloody crosses and</p> |

flaming serpents which an imaginative ignorance saw in the comets of past ages, are suggestive of a fact which men are ever thrusting aside, the fact that Nature violated will take thousandfold vengeance. Let a man offend her, and he involves a score of generations in her nets; his children are born into a smiling world with halters round their necks. And why not? The halters were placed there by himself, not by Nature. Would we have our goddess a laughing-stock, a weakling, without the power to enforce her sanctions? We know—men knew before Lucretius articulated their unspoken thought—that in this fearful and inexorable mood she is at her noblest. No towering Jove astride the lurid heavens, not even the silent majesty of Athene Parthenos, grey-eyed, agaze from the city across leagues of sea, nor the purity, whiter and deadlier than molten steel, of the All-Wise, to whom it was said that the yearning soul fled mothlike to its glory and doom, can be compared with her in the grandeur of her wrath. We know, though we deny it daily, that our wickedness is her grief; the cruel act, the chilled heart, send a pang through Na-

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The wrath
of Nature

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Reparation

ture; we never wrong an individual, but a world, a universe. The anger of this our Mother is raised to the tragic sublimity by its being tempered with grief. I say 'with grief,' but never with relenting; and in the apparent horror of those dark times, when she stalks abroad in purple and spreads a pall over Memphis or Babylon or Hellas, the hands of the discerning are never raised to an inexorable power, however the timorous, the ignorant, the strangers to bird and beast and field may fall into a hysterical invocation of this and that divinity. Yet, though her law is unaltered, act and reward being not merely inseparable, but one event, she finds a way to repair the mischief by building her faithful hearts into the new race. As Greece tamed her Roman conquerors, so it has been in all the cataclysms of history. We learn from a beaten foe, and, if we have ourselves yielded, we are caught up in the cyclone of a conquering people. What deed of Gods or prophets has equalled, what can even suggest, these miracles of simultaneous vengeance and renovation, so irresistible, so automatic? From the wars of cellular bodies to the tumults of flaming

suns, the balance of death and new birth, of generation and decay, is eternally self-adjusting even to a feather's weight. It is possible for us of this age, with our free gaze down the aisles of history, to see what Egypt and Babylon could not see—that Nature caresses most tenderly where she has struck hardest.

AS Nature's treatment of worlds and nations, so is her treatment of each beast and plant and everything possessed of never so rudimentary a personality. I may have done nothing wrong, nor my ancestors, yet in suffering sorrow I am suffering no injustice. The balance of cosmic good and evil requires that I should suffer, and who am I, that I should dispute the laws of a mechanism which has been working smoothly for millions of years? Sometimes we are inclined to complain, naturally, though wrongly; then let us go out under the stars, and consider whether those vast deserts of stellar inanity do not dwarf our high tragedy to the lightest and most momentary of masques? I would not be thought to slight a human sorrow; the mimes of those world-dramas that recur from time to time in

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the pages of history, as at Salamis, Zama, Waterloo, cause no greater stir among the stars ; even Laconian Helen, that radiant ideal, one of the human imagination's chosen lovers, must fade to a dancing, diaphanous ephemeron under our contemplation of infinite vistas of worlds.

Development

IN the keenest lancinating pains which the mind can suffer we are not being hardly treated. We are receiving measure for measure. If for an hour, or a year, or a thousand years, our burdens shall have been more than is common, then our strength is grown by so much greater than the strength of our fellows. On this earth we are thwarted, confined, under authority ; then we shall be the stronger for our sojourn here. To nations and men and ideas oppression ever has been a wise nurse, stiffening the spirit to conquest ; all history tells only of the swing of a pendulum. 'To-morrow we die,' says one. 'Let us eat and drink.' Rather let us fast and be sober, in case the morrow bring fighting. Another cries, 'Rest ? Shall I not have all eternity to rest in ?' and is almost as far from the truth. Because we find no rest here, are we to infer a

rest hereafter ? We ought rather to infer, groping, as ever, among analogies, that everywhere is restlessness, everywhere motion and activity. When has a man seen an eddy in a stagnant pond ? Yet that is his idea of this earthly life. Moreover, in Paradise and Nirvana can be no life, but only existence — no real sleep nor waking, but only a doze. Would you take a strong, unyielding soul, to whom the strife against great odds is the very breath of his life, and pen him in a garden ? The lion eating straw like the ox is a more credible fancy. It behoves us rather to lengthen our stride, to follow the straight trail with no mirage of ultimate Elysian fields, no hope of our war-song ever dying away to a vesper hymn. ‘Man is something to be surpassed;’ because he can never be surpassed in this life we need not despair. We are not pressed for time; we have infinite space for a workshop and eternity in which to labour. We may spend this time on earth in slumber, but then it will be harder to put on the harness and clench the mailed fist ; it is better spent in preparation for whatsoever task may arise. On the eve of battle the wise heart cannot slumber ; rather it takes

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counsel until the dawn and the battle are at hand. We give time and care, and far too much of both, to making ourselves efficient for this life, instead of for the thousand lives to come. It matters little that we cannot write a *Hamlet* or add two and two, if only we can rule our own souls and shape them to an existence more than temporal.

The boon
of anguish

WHAT we deem to be Fortune's smile is a sorry grimace after all; her frown has the truer beauty. That man or woman achieves the highest nobility who is left single-handed against the greatest odds; the very best fate that can befall us is to be deserted by those upon whose aid we rely, and betrayed by the hearts which have beat against our own. Such desertion or betrayal may cause us the keenest anguish which it is possible in our presently limited range of emotions to experience; but in spite of this, nay, rather for this very reason, it is the greatest boon that can fall to our lot. By adversity we learn to stand alone, and to repudiate, though we might have reaped a benefit therefrom, the infirm ideal of bearing one another's burdens. By ad-

versity we grow cold to the transient gain, and turn with deliberation to the shaping our own souls. By adversity we add cubits to our stature and grow to manhood in an hour; as we hear of men turning grey in a single night through great sorrow, so we may be sure that it is not in outward appearance only that suffering adds years to our age. It is strange and, in part, unfortunate that, when once they are at an end, the long, sunless hours of pain fade swiftly from the sight, and we forget them; but the brief moments of joy, like stars gathered in familiar constellations round the memorable things of our lives, are with us until death—and why not beyond? Yet even with such vision as we have, we may see, if we will, a myriad of new stars. They are the stars of a nebula which is called Pain.

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YESTERDAY the field beyond this garden-hedge was being mown in the old-fashioned way which still lingers on here. The scythe swept through the grass, a gleaming, malformed Destiny; I saw its rhythmic rise and fall, heard its ironical sigh as each swath of tender green lives sank to forgetfulness beneath

Death

| | |
|---|---|
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| <p data-bbox="239 227 344 274">CHAPTER III</p> <p data-bbox="236 958 350 1006">Its insignifi- cance</p> | <p data-bbox="376 218 968 910">its icy touch. That sigh is the audible expression of the chill cynicism, freezing the heart, which we call too euphemistically the irony of fate. I had watched the grass in this field since it was the palest, most inexperienced of greennesses ; in the heyday of its youth ; in its June vigour and boisterous Saturnalia, with those gay mummers, the poppies, dancing through the long day in its midst. Here sun and rain and the morning dew had squandered their treasure ; the earth had given her best gifts ; and now under the dry, summer mists, into which the song of the lark fell from far above in tiny drops of sound, came the sudden gleam and tremor, the rustle of proud, stricken stems.</p> <p data-bbox="376 953 968 1405">IT is not possible to forget how the author of the one hundred and third Psalm wrote: ‘As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.’ Yet those two incidents, birth and death, to one of which we attach all conceivable epithets of horror and finality and gloom, are no more a beginning and an end than are the sun’s</p> |

rising and setting, or the sleep and waking of delicate flowers. The darkness which stills the thrush's rondo and the sparrow's travesty on three notes brings with it the call of the owl and the nightingale's plaintive romance; and mythology, the storehouse of primary and beautiful truths, knows these two as the birds of wisdom and of dolorous love. So the hour when twilight edges away to the darkness, the hour when life for a space grows placid in death, are alike no more than a time of exchanging old songs for new; and whether it happens hereafter that we sleep or wake, there will always and in all places be heard something of the clear tones of wisdom and the exquisite sorrowing of love. These and all the elemental truth and beauty which the ages have shaped must be in every world eternal and ageless — imperfect, perhaps, or overcast with superstitions, but at no time non-existent. We ought, therefore, to meet death with our minds intent upon nothing but what is immortal — upon those things which must have been at our sides in all worlds hitherto, if such there have been, and in all worlds to come await us as radiant brides; and to

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Its
adventitious
solemnity

cherish the spirit of that farewell of Saint Paul to the Philippians: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'

WE are apt to feel, perhaps, that there are notions belonging to death so solemn and terrific that mankind in general can never cease to regard it as a horror to be long postponed and even spoken of in undertones as of fear. Its mysterious finality — the complete dissolution — the fact that in all history there is not a single authenticated instance of one returning after death to revisit the earth — these, you say, are facts which no man will ever contemplate without some misgiving. But this appearance of finality, of total extinction, is no more than an error of perspective: we stand in the shadow both of birth and death, as in a narrow gorge, and so close to either that their true nature is utterly indistinguishable. Could we take a wider cosmic view, birth and death

would appear as ridges in a furrowed field —as mere contingencies in a cycle of existence of which this earth is the merest fragment. Do we marvel that the butterfly never returns to the chrysalis state?

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Death and
animism

IT is such absence or error of perspective that the animistic habit of thought can correct. When we watch the flowers that die day by day and the insects whose life may be reckoned in hours, when we live among these small and weakly forms of existence, of a frailty so pathetically human, and range ourselves beside them as our fellow-travellers through 'the everlasting Now,' then we learn to see man as a fragment of the Cosmos and not the cosmos as a supplement to Man; and in the passing of all existence, the lovely and the foul, through the change which we call death, we see only the splitting of the blind and sleepy chrysalis, the bursting of the seedling in its tomb. Concerning our modern life the text of the animistic spirit is the poverty of mere wealth; concerning death it has a single message — 'Wait!' By following this time-spirit of animism, though it seem never so plainly

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| <p data-bbox="231 218 332 266">CHAPTER III</p> <p data-bbox="236 497 327 544">Inaudible harmonies</p> <p data-bbox="244 1282 319 1303">A dream</p> | <p data-bbox="365 210 954 454">to be a swan's song to the ear and to the eye a Jack-o'-lantern, we come at length to accept as a compromise that state of expectation which best can fit us for the time of striking tents and setting forth upon the next stage of our progress — whither?</p> <p data-bbox="365 491 954 1234"> WHAT is death, that we should hate the thought of it? I think — I cannot help thinking of death as a stepping out into open air, as the dawning of a new vision, or as a recollection of forgotten things when the last cadences of this our earthly nocturne are floating into the soul, wave upon sleepy wave, until all our hopes and ideals murmur in gorgeous consonance with its harmonies. You remember with what alternation of gloom and sunshine, so wonderfully painted in Wagner's music, the Gods crossed the rainbow-bridge into Walhalla? It is as crossing such a bridge and as hearing such music that a man should pass from his cradle in Time to a wider, unfettered manhood in Eternity. </p> <p data-bbox="365 1277 954 1402"> OF the psychology of dreams much has been written, little is known; but almost any dream faithfully told has </p> |

a deep and hardly expressible interest. I dreamed at a time when death had been lately present in my thoughts that I met in the fields a child of marvellous beauty and grace. Of his dress, his bearing, and his mien I remember—ah! the perversity of dreams!—nothing except their princely and Oriental magnificence; only in his eyes can I recall the limitless depths—‘deeper than e’er plummet sounded’—of expression. In their gaze was nothing chill or wintry, but rather something of an autumnal temper—of a half-voluptuous languor, as in the eyes of one who had gazed too long upon woods of beaten copper and trees gilded by the Midas touch of death, upon fathomless glow of sunset and mist-wreaths twisted by the twilight airs for summer’s bier, and who had heard in the thin rustle of the willows, as they sigh their leaves into the stream, the song of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. I gazed at him, and his beauty and sorrow became in some strange way no longer his, but mine; as by a transient gleam of light I understood for one moment of luxurious anguish the nature of that mingled pain and delight of which I had read in Saint Teresa’s story of her life.

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A warning voice from some immense distance urged me to fly, but like a heedless lover I brushed discretion aside, and, 'Tell me your name !' I said. I caught the child's small, white hand. It was colder, far colder, than ice ; and, before he could tell me his name, I awoke.

Even now the extreme bitterness of that awakening has scarcely faded from my memory, for with every day the belief has grown fast upon me, now amounting to certainty, that his name was no other than Death.

Dreaming

I CANNOT help thinking that such dreams as these, which seem like a coquetry of Beauty with the enamoured soul momentarily freed from its prison, have a deeper significance than we practical beings suppose. I know that in thinking about a subject which is barnacled with old superstitions, I may be unconsciously affected by their influence. I know that dreams are to a great extent dependent upon physiological causes. Yet in spite of all this I continue to speculate upon a matter about which I shall never have any certain knowledge as long as I remain on earth. Perhaps also the

only fact of which I am really sure in regard to this

‘Weird, wild clime that lieth sublime
Out of Space, out of Time,’

which we call Dreamland, is that I have brought back from its wilderness a store of such memories as the heart longs for. In a life passed, like mine, less among men and women than among lights and shadows, and girt with shadowy joys and pains, these dreams are events, their scenery is powerfully dramatic, the memory of them forms a character; of those that are remembered at all, none is ever forgotten; of those that are remembered, the remembrance is priceless. How often does one voice speak to us across the distance of dreams! How often through their tinted haze do we see one form! I would hardly believe that these were wholly illusions, though that voice itself should tell me; to do so were to take the first and irrevocable step to the moral helplessness of disillusion, for they are a link with all beauty. Nor this one form only, but the other fairest souls and most beautiful of human shapes to which history and art and imagination have given

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birth—Socrates, with his toad-like form and god-like nature, and Galahad, that ‘good man of his hands’ who was also found pure, and the lady Mary of Nazareth, the model of veiled sisterhoods and ‘ladies bright in bower,’ in whom are the first and last of all womanly ideals—these too have shed the radiance of their presence and left the ring of their voices in my dreams: am I, then, to value these latter, so rare and so wonderful, less than the vulgarities which are my waking thoughts?

Birthdays

WHEN I was a boy I began to compile an almanac of the birthdays of my loved heroes, poets, saints, and beautiful women. I used to print the names of my battle-heroes in red, the hue of the blood which they shed; the names of poets in green, the colour of the fields which they loved; the names of women in blue—was it not the colour of their eyes? and the names of the saints in all three, for in them were united the valour of the soldier and the high thoughts of the singer and the devotion passing the love of women. For a time these days were my festivals, and upon the vigil of each it was

my custom to ponder over the immensity of issues which lay behind the curtain of the morrow. Upon the 10th of November in the year 1483, a tiny animal of contemptible weakness and fragility was born at Eisleben in Thuringia; upon the 15th of August in the year 1769, an animal tinier still, of even less apparent significance, was born at Ajaccio. Yet the great Papal power would have trembled at the birth of the first, and powers greater than the Pope at the birth of the second, had they foreseen to what world-stature these two would grow; for they were Luther and Napoleon. But after a while I began to see that, however portentous to the world may be the birth of a giant soul, a greater significance to the soul itself lies in its passing from the earth by death. This simple transition round which man has grouped, like ghastly statuary, his most stupendous thoughts, his gravest emblems of mystery and extinction, this, as I told myself, is of no greater moment in itself than a birth, of infinitely less moment than a marriage, but from its consequences it draws an adventitious importance which makes it our wonder and

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our bewilderment. From one point of view it is true, as Spinoza told us, that 'Death is the most insignificant event of life, absolutely without effect on character, and utterly incapable of influencing an eternal destiny.' From another point of view, death is the parting of the last link in the fetters of our strange human dualism, the vanishing of the familiar harbour-lights, the passing of the Pillars of Hercules. We watch our friends, when they start upon a sea voyage, until their ship is hull-down upon the horizon; it is thus that I muse over the death, and no longer the birth, of the mailed fighters good at need and the saintly hearts whose battles were won in silence and, alas! (cannot we pity them most of all in this?) often in comradeless gloom.

Nunc dimittis

A DYING man told me that he no longer feared death (as if that were so great a matter for congratulation!), but that he thought it hard not to live a little longer in this beautiful world. I asked him, 'Have you once seen the sunrise on the craters of the moon? Or have you once heard the birds' song in dark spring dawns? Then do you not *yet* know

the spirit of the *Nunc Dimittis*? Not only these, but countless wonderful sights and sounds have been given for our pleasure; Nature has been our lavish mistress; can we pout and call her niggard, because she sends us on an unknown quest? Ought we not rather to take our leave of her like bold knights errant, with hearts trusting in our Gloriana? Countless worlds are fellow-adventurers with us: whither we are going matters nothing, nor whence; it is enough that here we are permitted to see a wonder of beauty before we yield our place to others. Even if we are to endure ages of suffering greater than is conceivable by the human mind, we shall still be in debt to Nature.

Let us, then, go to death as the gulls swoop to the waves after stormy weather — with a cry of ‘The Sea!’ and the laughter of a soul long pent inland.

I WALKED through the black abysses of shadow which the cypresses cast on the ground; for the moon had risen. The cypress has that monstrous and daemonic character which belongs to the scenery of the Apocalypse and of dreams.

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The cypress

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Suetonius, in a phrase like a thunderclap, speaks of the Emperor Claudius as a prodigy of a man (*portentum hominis*), and the expression returns inevitably to my mind at the sight of a cypress — *portentum arboris*. Other trees have a disposition, the cypress has a character; other trees have emotions, but in the cypress is incarnate the inhuman tranquillity of fate. A clump of almost any other trees delights the eye like a bevy of beautiful women; to meet with a clump of cypresses is like meeting a bronze group of the Parcae. Every school of philosophy has its disciples among the trees. We think of the oak as self-sufficient and a Stoic, the pine as an ascetic on the mountains, 'whose heads touch heaven,' the poplar as a subjective spirit wrapped in dreams; but the cypress is the saturnine and cynical witness of those momentary pomps and fading emblazonries by which the world fans itself into a flutter of optimism. For, being planted, as it is, round the churches where men and women go through the stately rites of marriage and where their children are joyfully baptized, yet — passionless spectator of a tragedy whose crisis is never reached, dusky sentinel over the

illimitable fields of death, it has been for centuries the symbol of mortality, the tutelary genius of that last irony in the drama of worldly existence, the burial of unconquerable Man.

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Night

I WALKED home by the river, whose serpentine shape the wind and moon were covering with scales; past the hills between which mist always lies like water in the palm of a giant hand; past the poplars, ghostly effigies that were now black, now white, as the breeze raised and fondled and jilted their leaves; under the hills, stretched like recumbent beasts in a landscape of neutral tints; hearing the peewit's sorry lament; crumpling the leaves which made in their death such a fair Byzantine mosaic upon the road that I almost forgot to look for the Gothic tracery of branches overhead. For the last hours before the dawn wood and meadow reserve their most potent magic, for then the night is telling her secrets to her lovers—to the owls and moths and the voluble spirits of trees and running water—to man and woman, if they will but stop to listen to her undertones. In an hour the sky will be over-clouded;

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| 134 | The Silences |
| CHAPTER III | <p>from the western horizon a cloud is flying over the plain like the he-goat in Daniel's vision, that 'came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground.'</p> |
| The clouds | <p>THE clouds bring us in their deep and silent hearts the same happiness finely coloured with melancholy as the high rapture of music, or the aspiration of philosophy, or the tremor of poetry, or the memory of a lovely dream. Among all that earth can show of pure and beautiful forms they are the purest, yet also the strongest in their appeal to the one sense by which they are perceptible. Where else upon the earth are there these million variations upon Nature's most heavenly theme, the melody of the curve? Where is there such a fulfilment of the delicacy and gradual variation which Burke demanded as inalienable conditions of beauty? Where such 'a spirit-like feeling, a capricious mocking imagery of passion and life,' as makes of the shapes of heaven ironical symbols and wraiths of the shapes of earth? Those skiffs with vanishing sails and galleons freighted with transoceanic wealth, des-</p> |

tined to reach no harbour, but only to pass through the cycles of existence as ghostly derelicts of the sky, are Nature's arch parody of human fortunes. It was thus that the Immortals laughed at man to teach him wisdom. I never see one of these sylphid forms trailing robes golden in sunlight or silvered over by the moon without thinking of the tale of Ixion—surely one of the saddest (in the parabolic significance which is so easily attached to it) of all the sad Hellenic mythology. The story, strong in the irony of all solar myths, is the very tragedy of human idealism in brief. The love of Ixion, the radiant sun, for Hera, the large-eyed, the white-stoled, the queen of the ether, the wife of Zeus; her contempt of his passion; how she enticed him by the cloud shaped in woman's delicate form and veiled with airy vestures like her own; how, when Ixion, at the beginning of his weary ascent of heaven, came upon the white shape dreaming above the hill-tops, and rushed to clasp it in his arms, it faded away, yet returned when he had passed the spot; how he lingered near it (what lover would not?) until he was caught and bound for ever to the revolv-

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Ixion

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ing wheel as a punishment of his presumptuous passion for an Immortal: this is the history, all too veracious, of many a soul that is passionate at its wooing and many pure ideals that are never won.

The wind

ON this afternoon the west wind is racing down from the hills across twenty miles of open country and breaking on the window in solid billows. I can see each squall tear at the limbs of a great beech on the sky-line a mile away, snatching from them handfuls of leaves; a minute later it is screaming round the tall firs close to the house. Two rooks, whom hunger or the spirit of adventure has tempted to try their fortune on the walnut-tree in the little orchard, are beating up for their third attempt at a landing. When they have come to an anchor, they fix their beaks in a walnut and throw themselves headlong from the branch; the hurricane and the law of gravitation do the rest, though ungracefully. How I welcome these equinoctial gales, which bring days of Bacchantic revelling in the woods—weeks of revelling and witches' sabbaths! Again it is early in October, the polychrome month of the year, and

I have been listening for an hour to the declamation of a certain poplar. It is at this season that the most reticent of trees throws off its mask of reserve and joins with its comrades in shouting its secrets across a shouting countryside. I have often stood on a windy night about twelve paces to leeward from three of these monumental figures of Nature's modelling, and watched them curl over their black plumage, the home of unutterable woes; those bowed and despairing crests are the emblems of Life-in-Death, as the cypress is the emblem of Death himself. It has been said, 'We only see poplars in the sunset; they appear with the bats and the first stars.'* In the lulls of the hurricane they croon together, nodding wise heads over what we must suppose to be their peculiar metaphysical problems. At such times the song of the poplar, more mournful in the depth of its moaning than the monody of the reed-maiden Syrinx, and in its multitudinary chorus of sadness more impressive than the singing together of the morning stars, is a chaunt the most noble and the most harrowing of all the inexhaustible psalmody of Nature. For

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The poplar

* George
Moore, *Evelyn
Innes*.

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its voice is the composite voice of a hundred thousand leaves, each having its own tiny personality. Imagine all humanity to be built up into a single individual being, a breathing colossus of loves and hatreds more innumerable than the sand of the shore, possessed of the accents of Memnon and the stature of a Sphinx : to such a colossus, bowing beneath infinite reduplication of woes, the poplar would be the natural prototype. Upon a gusty day like this it is full of caprices, ruffling the silence with humour-some shouts ; at midnight, when the wind has nearly dropped, it will be a campaignile of melodious, sorrowful chimes.

WHILE I have been writing these poor thoughts, upon which the tolerant smile of one long gone hence sheds their only glory, I have seen Nature in all her familiar aspects. I have seen the childlike face of the country in spring, smiling through tears as it was said of Andromache, *δακρύνει γελάσασα* : in summer, when the buttercups paint our England like the plains of El Dorado : in autumn, when the fire has died out of the heart of the year, leaving it happy in

motherhood; when wind and rain are making their progress through the land, dragging grey skirts over the hills: in the night of winter, with the earth clad in her white vesture and radiant in sleep. The seasons roll past; the stars rise and set. Just now, when I sat down to write these last pages, I heard the noisy homecoming of the birds and saw the setting of the blood-red sun—or, as our Aryan fathers said, when they gazed awefully upon the same sight, I saw Indra dyeing the heavens with the gore of Vritra. Now the light has gone and the wind has gone; candles are lit, the bats are squeaking round the fir-tops, and the moon is alighting upon the Welsh hills with the same noiseless tread as when she stole over the slopes of Mount Latmos in search of young Endymion. How, think you, has the world changed since those days of Indra and Vritra, Dian and Endymion? Just as much and as little as it has changed since

I lit my candles, so far as I am concerned: for did I not love before
the dawn of Time, and
do I not love
still?

APOLOGIA DIFFIDENTIS

BY W. COMPTON LEITH

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The book has high literary merit ; the style is full of melody and colour, and the rich dreamy sentences rise into the air like wreaths of fragrant incense smoke. But there is an inner charm as well ; the book comes, one feels, from the heart, and is the expression of a refined and tender nature forced, or at all events believing itself forced, into a reluctant renunciation of the very qualities which lend to life its inner glow.

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